



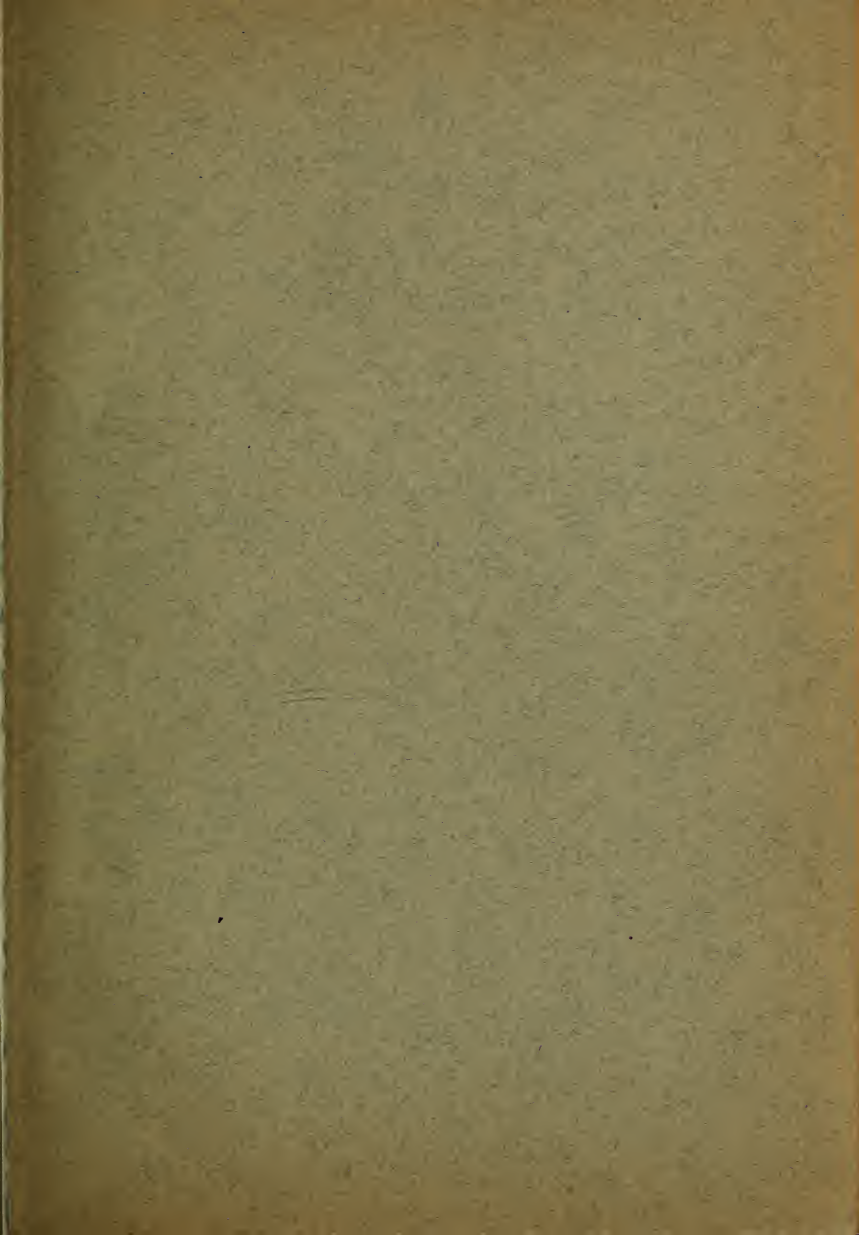
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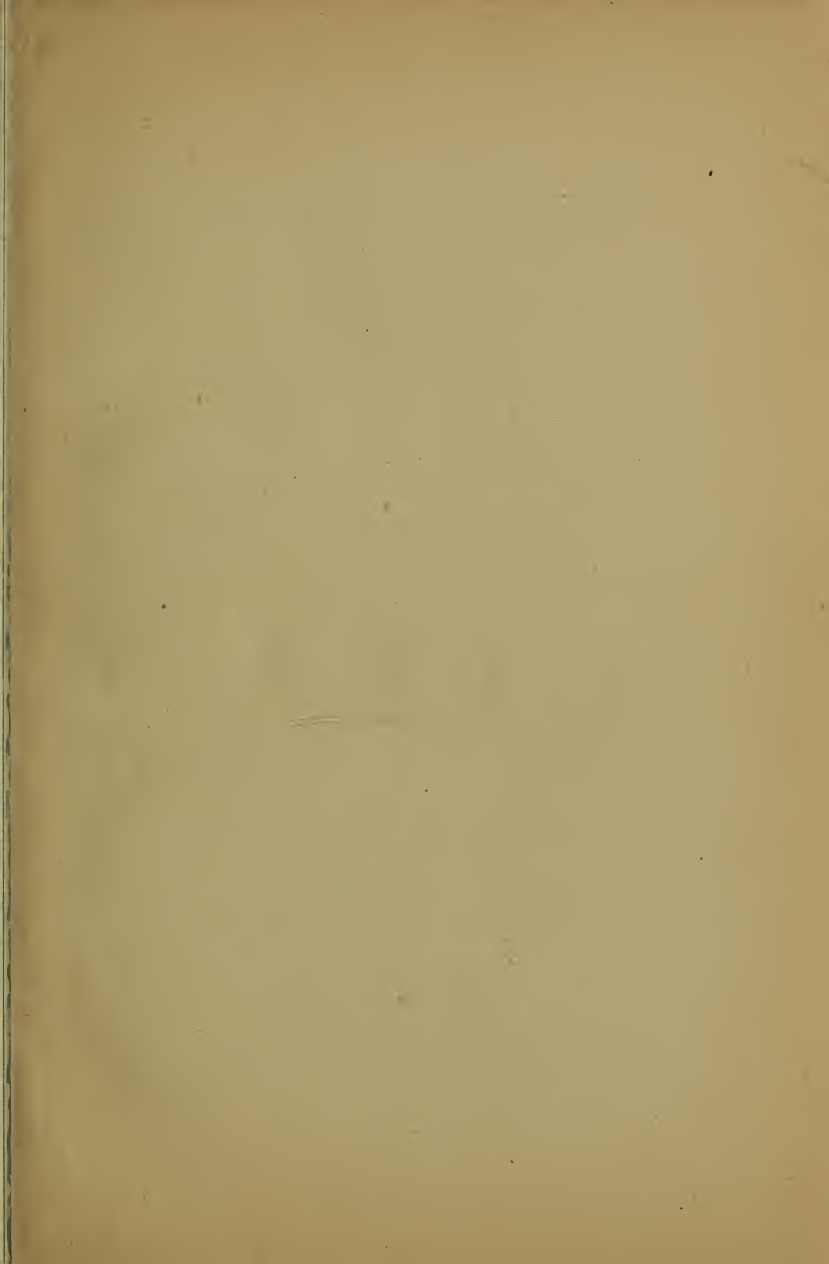
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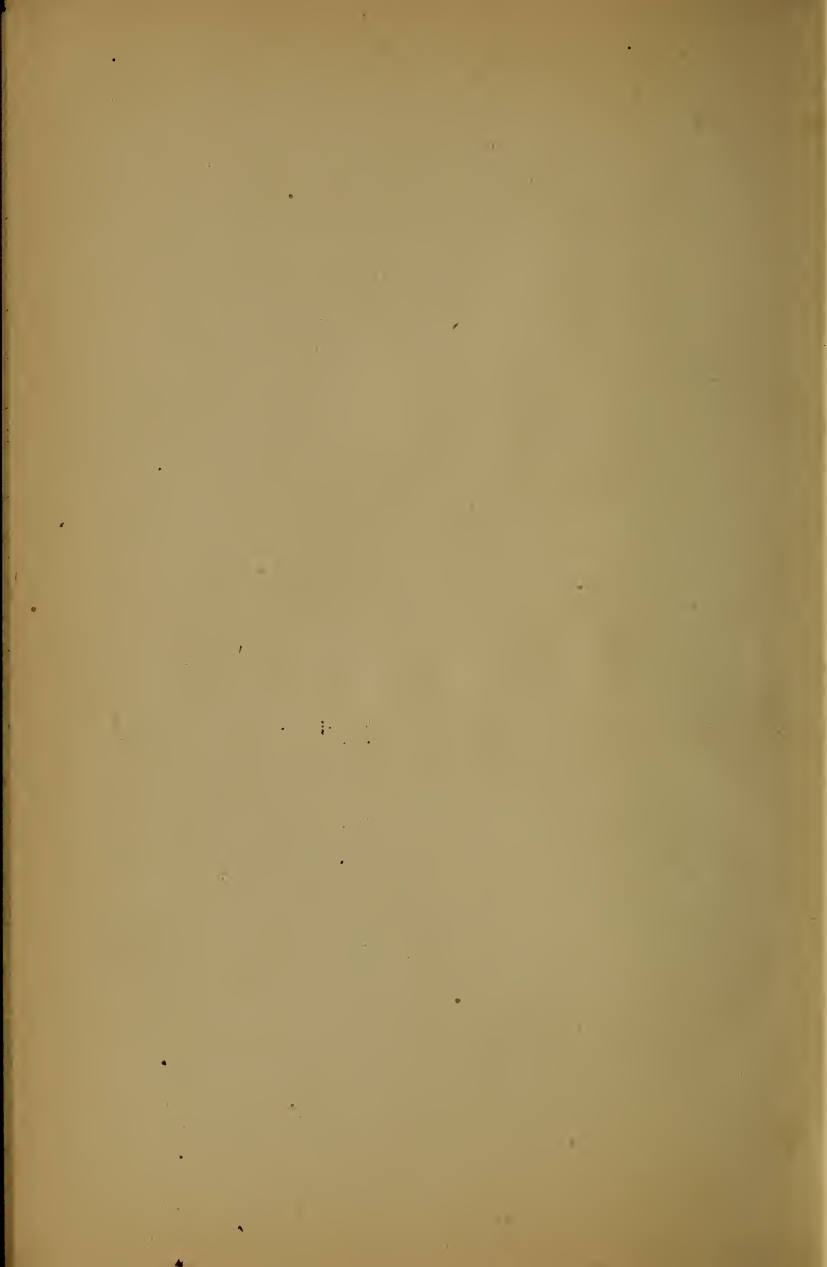
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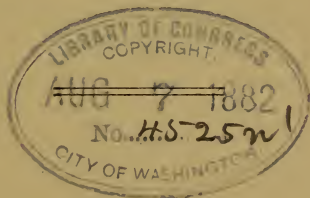
CHRISTIAN GROWTH.

BY

O. P. FITZGERALD, D.D.,

Editor of the Christian Advocate.

"GROW UP INTO HIM." Eph. iv. 15.



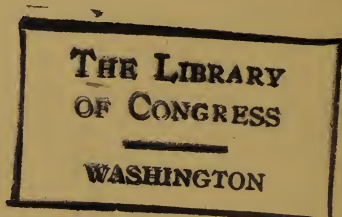
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PREFACE.

MAY the souls for whom these pages were written be blessed in reading them! May the Lord, to whom they are humbly dedicated, accept them! Amen.

THE AUTHOR.

Nashville, April, 1882.





Prefatory Note from Bishop H. H. Kavanaugh.

O. P. FITZGERALD, D.D.—*My Dear Brother*:—At a late interview which I recently enjoyed at your house with yourself and family, you were pleased to read to me what you called “the germ” of a treatise you have written on Christian Growth—a very profitable subject to be prudently discussed. It is well to know the measure of the privilege to which we are called in the gospel of the grace of God. To come at this, you have wisely made the spiritual *birth* and *growth* of the soul the basis of that work of grace that affects man’s moral purity and salvation, giving it a “meetness for the inheritance of the saints in light.”

This “birth and growth” are what the Scriptures make most prominent in presenting this subject. “As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” (1 Pet. ii. 2.) “Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: that we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doc-

trine, by the sleight of men." (Eph. iv. 13, 14.) But I need not multiply quotations—you have attended to that. I am glad that these essential features of the work of grace—the grace of sanctification—are so clearly brought out in your new work on the subject. I trust that it will be read by many to edification, comfort, and a large growth in grace, that they may know the truth that shall make them free—free indeed.

H. H. KAVANAUGH.

Louisville, Ky., February 28, 1882.





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A FIRST WORD.

"Come now, and let us reason together." ISAIAH i. 18.

THE Christian life includes birth and growth. There is nothing besides or beyond these.

It is a sublime paradox that the believer's inheritance will never be forfeited nor fully possessed. It embraces earth and heaven, eternity and God. It is an infinite blessing, worthy to be the gift of the infinite Creator. It is a satisfying portion—satisfying, not in the sense that a goal is reached beyond which nothing more is wished and looked for, but in the sense that growth is begun under conditions that make a relapse unnecessary and eternal continuance possible.

Growth is the one word that includes all

the precious truth that has been mystified by disputants who have injected their metaphysics into the crystal waters of salvation, muddying the stream and impeding its flow.

The gospel is not a riddle, but a revelation. It is not a labyrinth in which the inquirer must wander endlessly without finding the clew. Men have made mysteries where God has made none. He bids all to a feast where the table is spread, and of which they may freely partake—not to a chemical laboratory where the different dishes must be analyzed, weighed, or measured. Those who have taste and talent for this sort of thing may indulge their fancy, but let them not forbid us to eat until they have laid aside their crucibles, scales, and compasses. We cannot afford to starve in the midst of plenty.

The attempt has been made to map out the Christian life as if it were a quarter-section of land, the title to which depended on an exact survey of its boundaries. We have been halted on the bank of the river of God until

we should be able to utter some shibboleth framed by men prone to doubtful disputations. We have been stopped at toll-gates, and required to pay tribute to technical quibblers before they will permit us to travel on the highway of holiness. When we have asked for the bread of life, they have given us the stone of contention. When we have hungered for the fresh manna from heaven, they have given us the stale and moldy Gibeonitish crusts of old controversies. When our souls have yearned for the unclouded vision of Immanuel's face, a curtain of mystery has been interposed. When we have listened to hear that word which is spirit and life, we have been confused by an abracadabra invented by men who would, if they could, put their mint-mark on the gold that overlays the ark, illumed by the blazing Shekinah itself.

In the Sermon on the Mount our Lord swept away the mists from the sky, and made the path of the new life plain to all who are willing to walk therein. The Scribes and Phari-

sees were astonished because with authority he affirmed intuitive and self-evident truths. The sum of his teaching is love to God and man.

Jesus says: "I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall go in and out, and find pasture." O Master, we will accept thy gracious invitation! We will not shiver with cold and starve on the outside because some of our brethren have written things hard to be understood.

The conditions and possible measure of Christian growth concern us now. In other words, we are to inquire what our Lord proposes to give us, and the terms of its bestowment. Some plain words are offered on the life that we now live as believers—a life that takes in all of earth, and links itself to all of heaven. Spirit of truth, guide our thought! Amen.



THE NEW BIRTH.

"Ye must be born again." JOHN iii. 7.

THE beginning of the Christian life is the new birth. The new birth is the renewal of human nature by the grace of God.

The new birth is necessary. Without it no soul can enter the kingdom of heaven. This work is effected by the Holy Spirit.

The new birth is just what the words imply. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John iii. 3.) "That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit." (John iii. 6.) It is the work of the Holy Spirit. "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth; so

is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John iii. 8.) These words of our Lord are conclusive. The mystery of the new birth he did not attempt to explain. The fact is enough, and the experience satisfies. Birth and growth must not be confounded. The analogies between natural and spiritual birth will suggest all that is needed by the ingenuous reader. The new birth is the phrase used by the Holy Spirit to describe that transaction by which the soul is translated from darkness to light, and enters upon the new life of faith, obedience, and love. You do not grow into this new life—you are born into it. The growth comes afterward.

The antecedent preparation for the new birth may cover a wide space of time, but there is a precise point in which the process is consummated, as the rotary motion of the earth brings sunrise at a particular moment. This supreme moment comes to every soul that enters the new life—as gently as sunrise itself to some, and with throes of mighty conflict to others.

Timothy is the type of the early beginner in the Christian life. From a child he knew the Scriptures. His religious tendency was in an important sense hereditary. This was from the maternal side, as is often the case. A holy mother and grandmother transmitted to him religious susceptibilities, aptitudes, a genius for godliness, and made for his life an atmosphere warm with holy love and bright with the light of truth. Yet this did not preclude the necessity for the new birth, without which no soul can enter the kingdom of heaven. In such a case we may believe that the process was as gentle as the bursting of a bud into flower in the spring-time, when the sunshine and the rain have warmed and watered the roots of the plant. It is possible that he could fix no precise date for this experience. A Christian childhood cannot always be dated as you would the conversion of a heathen. Such a childhood has its revelations from God direct to the plastic soul. Ofttimes it has experiences that are vivid to the memory forever.

In the cases of ministers of Christ it has premonitions of the coming career that are astonishing to such as forget that for every human life God has a definite plan and purpose. Samuel heard in his boyhood the Voice that he was to repeat and interpret to his people in his manhood. There have been thousands of Timothies in the Church. There ought to be millions. He should now be the normal type of regeneration in Christian families. It will be so, we do believe, in the near future. The signs of the times justify the hope of a speedy and mighty advance in dealing with this question of childhood in the Church. Childhood in the Church! the very words have the sweetness of millennial music to the ear of faith. The path to universal Christian childhood in the Church lies through a wiser, holier manhood and womanhood in the Church. The gain henceforth will be rapid, and the consummation will hasten. As leaven the truth with regard to this matter is working in the mass of Christendom, the hearts of the parents are

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turning to the children, and Jesus is saying in all the languages spoken on earth, *Feed my lambs.*

As Timothy is the one type of the Christian life, Paul may be taken as the other. Both were regenerated, but under different conditions. The change in Paul's case involved his opinions, associations, aims, affections—everything. It was sudden. The shock was mighty, wrenching him violently from the old and starting him in a new life. The phenomena in his case were more striking, but the result was not more real than in that of Timothy. The work done in each was substantially the same. We err when we insist upon either type as the exclusive test of the genuineness of the profession of any who name the name of Jesus.

The process of the conversion of the treasurer of Queen Candace was essentially identical with those of Timothy and Paul. He was hungering for the truth, and his receptive soul responded to its claims at once when the

zealous deacon taught him out of the Scriptures. The account is brief, and not without design. The man's antecedents are unknown except that he was a seeker. He sought and found. His receptive soul attracted to him the agency that conveyed to him his Heavenly Father's loving answer to his cry for light and salvation. He knocked in the darkness, and the door opened into the light. The whole narrative is full of divine beauty, and is prophetic of the time when all the highways of this world will be trod by Christian travelers who will preach Jesus as they go, and send millions of converts on their journeys, born of God and rejoicing in the truth.

Then there is Cornelius, a man responsive to the claims of humanity, the attitude of whose soul toward truth and goodness was such that the moment his heart was touched by the word of truth it blossomed into life.

The new birth must precede the new life in all cases. But this is not saying that there is a uniform type of religious experience in all

who are truly born of God. There are divers manifestations, but only one Spirit. The accompanying phenomena are as different as the temperaments of individuals and their circumstances. Some natures bloom out at the first touch of grace like the early peach-blooms in March, while others, like the gnarled and sturdy oak, are slower in responding to the kisses of the sun. It is no evidence that you are not born again because your experience differs from that of some holy man or woman whom you love or admire. It is no proof that the gracious change has not been wrought because you cannot fix the date. Neither is its genuineness discounted because you are able to identify the very day and hour and the spot when you were converted. The marks of the new birth are plain enough to one who examines himself, Bible in hand, with a prayerful heart.

The Author of our salvation has not left us to grope on in doubt and darkness with reference to the most momentous of all questions.

It is what we might expect from his goodness, that the degree of certainty in all things pertaining to our destiny is proportioned to the value of the interest at stake. Health, temporal prosperity, the duration of the present life, are as uncertain as they are inferior in importance. But when it comes to the relation of the soul to God—a question where all is at stake—then certainty is promised and given to every believer.





EVIDENCES.

"He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." 1 JOHN V. 10.

IT has been said that no believer need be uncertain with regard to the new birth. If there could be no certainty about it, the Christian life would be indeed an unsatisfying, gloomy thing. Guesses will not satisfy the soul when heaven and hell are in the balances. Doubt is torturing when a failure is without remedy.

Am I a child of God? Have I been born again? The evidence within reach will determine this matter for every one who will enter upon the inquiry with humility, candor, and earnestness. What are the marks?

The first is a spirit of obedience. This is

comprehensive and, to a large degree, conclusive. The carnal mind is enmity against God. Enmity against God expresses itself in opposition to his law. The unregenerate fail to realize their enmity to God and his law because there are only moral sanctions now, and the penalty of disobedience is reserved for the future life. "By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments." (1 John v. 2.) The true righteousness of the law is fulfilled in all who are born of the Spirit—that is, the righteousness of an obedience that springs from love in a renewed heart. (Romans viii. 4.) Wherever there is a spirit of obedience to God there is a renewed nature. The absence of this spirit nullifies all claim to the new birth.

But let no one conclude that he is not a true believer because crosses are sometimes heavy, and the shrinking human nature complains when the path is rugged, and the burden makes him stagger and faint. A great sorrow may stun and paralyze the soul for a time, and it

may not be able to say, "Thy will be done," and yet there may be in the depths of the troubled heart a principle of obedience that would enable its possessor to die rather than willfully disobey God. Out of temporary darkness the true child of God always comes stronger than before. The principle of holy obedience is inwrought into the innermost fibers of the soul when it is fused anew in the white heat of sorrow's crucible. Its normal state and action restored, the soul accepts the Divine will without reserve, saying with a new depth of meaning and the emphasis of a blessed experience, "Thy commandments are not grievous." Whoso can say this intelligently and heartily has been born again.

Another mark of the new birth is love toward Christians. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." This love is not to be confounded with natural affection and friendships, based upon congeniality of disposition, identity of interest, or agreement in opinion. It is

a love to Christians as Christians — because they are Christians. The heart of this matter was touched by a Presbyterian lady who, when asked whether she loved believers of other Churches as she did those of her own Communion, said, thoughtfully and gently, “Yes; I love alike all who bear the image of my Saviour.” Love to Christ is the bond of union between his followers. They are near to each other when they are near to him. They are one in him. This tie does not supersede social and conventional relationship and association, but it is stronger and more sacred than any merely worldly bond. Like seeks like. This law never fails to be a discerner of the real affinities of souls. If you love Christians, you will be drawn toward them. In their company you will find a pleasure not found elsewhere in the world. Christians think the same thoughts, have the same feelings, entertain the same hopes—the same blessed destiny awaits them. They are born of the same Spirit, and this gives them essential identity of nature and destiny.

The new birth is the cohesive bond uniting all regenerate souls. And this new birth is the only solid basis for the Christian unity longed for by all truly Christian hearts, and prayed for by our Lord just before his crucifixion. When all are baptized into one Spirit they may be gathered into one fold. Then there will be one peaceful flock following the one Shepherd, who will lead them into green pastures and beside the still waters. Then they shall all be one, as Jesus and his Father are one, and the sacerdotal prayer of our Lord will be answered in all the fullness and graciousness of its meaning. That day will come, for

The Father hears him pray,
His dear Anointed One;
He cannot turn away
The presence of his Son.

A man is known by the company he prefers. If you prefer Christian society because it is Christian, it is an evidence that you have been born into the Christian life. This test will not lead you astray. Try yourself by it. The re-

sult will give you occasion to rejoice with exceeding joy, or to go to your knees in penitential supplication.

There is another mark of the new birth, or of entrance into the new life. That mark is the direct witness of God to the heart. "The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit that we are the children of God." (Romans viii. 16.) Filial love springs up in the heart that has been changed by saving grace. Though the truth may be imperfectly grasped as a tenet of dogmatic theology, the feeling is there.

The Spirit answers to the blood,
And tells me I am born of God.

A believer need not go outside of his own consciousness in this matter. "*He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.*" (1 John v. 10.) God certifies his own gracious work.



GROWTH.

"Grow in grace." 2 PETER iii. 18.

THUS born into the Christian life, the child of God has but one thing before him henceforth and forever, and that is growth. No new faculties will ever be given him. His moral nature, comprising intellect, sensibility, and will, is as complete as is the body of a child well developed in form and feature. But the one must grow as must the other. As the means of physical growth are provided for the body, so the means of spiritual growth are provided for the soul.

All theories of the Christian life that set aside the idea of unceasing growth are misleading. There is a Beyond to every goal in Christian experience. From every height a

still higher summit invites you. When a man tells you he is fully saved, he speaks truly if he is abiding in Christ by a living faith; but if he mean that he has no more battles to fight, no more growth to make in the Christian life, he deceiveth himself. If he does not forget the things that are behind, and reach forth to those that are before, he will fall into darkness. The perfect consecration is a consecration perpetually renewed. The perfect love is a stream fed forever from the Fountain through faith that lives and works. Thorough work is what God proposes, and it is what we want. No soul can be converted on a basis of narrower purpose and expectation than this: the whole soul and body, for time and eternity, must be set apart to the service of God by an act of the will, by the help of the Holy Spirit, before you can be an accepted believer in Jesus Christ. You may call this initial sanctification if you will, or you may call it justification only. Only! By the use of that word we would not undervalue the blessing of rec-

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onciliation with God, the pardon of sin, and birth into the life of the Lord. Only! Only paradise to the dying thief, only the beginning of life eternal to millions who have been justified by faith, and entered into the joys of salvation. Only! No soul was ever justified while cherishing any thought, desire, or purpose, inconsistent with a consecrated soul. The blood of Jesus cleanses from sin every justified soul. The uncleansed soul cannot be fit for the family of God on earth or in heaven. Forgiveness and cleansing are not separable in fact. To remove the eruption of small-pox from the patient, and leave the seeds of the disease in the system, would be a very unsatisfactory sort of treatment. God does not do his work after that sort. Every pardoned sinner is also a purified sinner. Salvation by the blood of Christ is salvation from sin—not merely absolution from its penalty. The pardon of a criminal by human authority may be wholly arbitrary, and without confession, repentance, change of disposition, or promise of

amendment on the part of the offender. But God does not promise or bestow pardon except on these conditions, compliance with which involves a change of the heart and life. All the talk about justification being a judicial act in the mind of God is meaningless if you leave out of the question the fact that the whole transaction means a new heart and a new life, These analogies mislead when thus used. The Holy Ghost is shed abroad in every soul justified by faith. Who will tell us that this joy of the Holy Ghost is given to a soul yet uncleansed? Justification is the restoration of the soul to the image, as well as the favor, of God. The grace that pardons purifies. The blood that atones also cleanses. Then let no justified soul be chilled into silence or doubt when it would sing its song of joy:

O the rapturous height Of that holy delight
Which I felt in the life-giving blood !
Of my Saviour possessed, I was perfectly blessed,
As if filled with the fullness of God.

Good men have done bad work in this mat-

ter. They have clouded landscapes that were bright with the smile of the Lord. They have checked songs of triumph from hearts bounding with joy, and turned them into the sighings of despondency. They have changed the voice of loving testimony to a sin-pardoning Saviour into painful questionings. The Christian life is perfect at every stage—for that stage. All its ways are ways of pleasantness and peace. It is life in God—healthy, happy life—perfect in every stage of its development from birth to maturity, from justification to glorification.





CHRISTIAN CHILDHOOD.

“As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.” I PETER ii. 2.

JESUS set a child in the midst of his ambitious and contentious disciples, and pointed to it as the true type of the kingdom of God. The Apostle Paul, on the other hand, makes it matter of reproach to certain persons that they were babes in the Christian life. The apostle has reference to those who had been converted years before, and had the means of grace within their reach, but had not grown. “When for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God.” They were forgetting the very A B C of Christian truth and Christian living. Remember

who these people were. They were the contemporaries of those who had seen and talked with the Lord Jesus Christ; who had been present at the Pentecost, and seen its tongues of flame, and felt its breath of power; who were witnesses of the resurrection and ascension of the Lord. They were the fruits of an apostolic ministry. These were the men, and these were the women, who had stopped short in their Christian course, and relapsed into the feebleness and imbecility of spiritual babyhood. Shame on them! you say. The words of the apostle are half-reproachful, half-indignant: When you ought to be men and women of full stature, strong in faith, well-instructed in the things of God, and able to help others, you are but sickly infants. The apostle intended no disparagement of childhood — healthy, natural, growing childhood. There is beauty and sweetness in childhood, both natural and spiritual. A little girl, four or five years old, well developed in form and feature, is a beautiful and attractive object. She

has in her all the potentialities of sweet maidenhood, blooming womanhood, and matronly grace and dignity. But let her stop growing at this age, and live to be forty years old. Forty years old, and not a yard high! That is not childhood—that is dwarfhood, stunted growth, arrested development. Or take a healthy, well-formed boy of five years. There is an attractive object, because in him are all the possibilities of a strong and noble manhood. But let him stop growing at that age, and live on until he is forty years old. There he stands, mature in years, with his whiskers, men's clothing, and mannish ways—and yet he is not more than a yard high! That is not the beauty of childhood—it is the repulsiveness of dwarfhood. There is none of the freshness, sweetness, and bloom, of childhood, nor the strength, and dignity, and wisdom, of manhood. The Churches are crowded with these stunted growths—spiritual dwarfs, that long ago ceased to grow.

Many Christians remember well the blos-

soming-time in their religious experience, and often revert to it with joy. Sometimes a mistake is made at this point. Excellent Christian men and women look back to that period as the brightest and best of all. This ought not to be so. To-day, not yesterday, ought to be the best day. But there is a law of the mind that makes all first impressions the most vivid. A first experience of any kind is the most lasting in the memory. The first fish a boy catches, the first deer he shoots, is never forgotten. The first time the momentous question is asked and responded to by young lovers is a memory that is never lost. The first Christian experiences are for this reason the most vivid. So the believer may have grown in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ as the years have rolled on, and he may be wiser, stronger, and, in the deepest sense, more blessed, but the first love still stands out in his memory with the vividness of a first impression, and is a joy forever. So it ought to be. A happy conversion and first experience is a

joy for time and eternity. But this is not the best part of a true Christian life. The blossoms of early rapture perfume all the air, but when the blossoms have fallen and faded the fruit appears. The morning-glory on the hills at sunrise is ravishing, but the midday radiance is brighter, and the twilight calm is sweeter. A true life is all blessed, but the best wine is at the last of the feast. The mat-in-song of the new-born soul is joyful, but there is a diviner sweetness in the song of the night when the Comforter touches the chords of the sorrowing heart. The first days were not the best, though they were blessed, and will be sweet to the memory forever.

That was a blessed experience of Jacob at Bethel, when he had the glorious vision of the mysterious ladder, with its foot on the earth, and its top in the starry depths of the heavens, and the angels of God ascending and descending thereon. But on the banks of the Jabbok, long afterward, he had a more glorious manifestation of God, when in his trouble and peril

he wrestled with the Angel of the Covenant and prevailed. Our Jabboks bring us nearer to God than our Bethels.

Your life may be blessed and brightened with many seasons of special grace and joy, but let nothing of the sort expel from your thought and your desire the idea of growth. Every such special blessing is a new starting-point from a higher plane—not a stopping-place.

The concentric circles in an oak a century old show the growth of every year—each complete in itself, but all massed together to form the mighty trunk of the monarch of the forest. Cut into it, and you will find that its heart is sound. This insured its growth, though its branches might at times be twisted and torn, and its roots shaken by tempests. So is Christian experience in the heart of a true believer. Deep-rooted in faith, and sound at the core of a loving heart, it adds grace to grace, strength to strength — every blessed manifestation of God preparing the way for another. Its

growth is continuous. The storms of temptation do not overthrow it. The infirmities that may in some measure mar the perfect symmetry and beauty of the spiritual life do not stop its development. Do not mistake temptation for apostasy or backsliding. Do not be disheartened because you fall short of the perfection you covet. Be sure you are sincere in your purpose to follow Christ, and keep alive the longing for all that your Lord proposes to bestow. This purpose itself is a heavenly growth in your soul. This longing is a seed that will grow into a mighty harvest of blessedness to you. The measure of holy aspiration is the measure of possible attainment by the child of God. It is God that worketh in you. Do not limit the Holy One of Israel. The desires that he enkindles he will satisfy. The hope he sets before you shall come to fruition. The best that is in your thought he will put into your life. Your wish cannot go beyond his willingness and his resources. He shall give you the utmost de-

sire of your heart. In you shall be fulfilled all the good pleasure of his goodness. The Author of your faith will be its Finisher—its Finisher in the sense that no part of all that he hath promised shall fail. His promises are exceeding great and precious, and in their fulfillment we are made partakers of the Divine nature, and made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light.

This is a summary expression of the truth that you may go on increasing in likeness to God, being changed into the same image from glory to glory as by the Spirit of the Lord, and that you may become more and more fitted for the holy companionships and joys of the city of God.

We propose to consider specifically the means of promoting growth in the Christian life.



THE BIBLE.

“Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.” PSALM CXIX. 105.

MILLIONS of persons even in Christian lands are unable to read. The Bible is to them a sealed book, except as it may be read and expounded in their hearing by others. Their ignorance is in most cases involuntary; it is not their fault that they must take the word of life at second-hand. God will make due allowance for all such. Little being given, little will be required. Only willful ignorance is punishable. Responsibility is measured by opportunity. The gate of heaven is not shut against any but the willfully disobedient. A humble soul, receptive of truth, and turned to the Lord in the attitude of loving obedience,

becomes wise in the things of God, being taught of the Holy Spirit. The pure heart mirrors correctly every image of heavenly truth that falls upon it, while the evil heart gives a distorted reflection, though the intellect may be ever so keen and cultured. The world by wisdom knows not God. They who will do his will shall know of the doctrine. On these equitable principles our Father in heaven deals with all his children. His ways are equal. He writes his law in the heart from which the written word is withheld. As many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God, and they have the witness in themselves.

For the reader of this book there can be no valid excuse. The pages of the blessed Bible are open to you. The book was given you that it might be a light to your path, and a lamp to your feet. Its words are spirit, and they are life. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for all the uses of Christian instruction and nurture. It

is an inspired book, and it is an inspiring book. The Holy Spirit guided in the writing, and it guides in the reading of it. The letter is dead, but the Spirit quickeneth. It is the voice of the living God to living men. Inspiration gave it, inspiration interprets it, and applies it to the believing soul. To slight God's word is to slight its Author. The unopened, dusty Bible tells the secret of many a barren life and joyless experience. The morocco-bound, gilt-edged volume, that lies as an ornament on the center-table, or the velvet-bound smaller volume in the bed-chamber, are silent witnesses against their negligent owners.

The writer spent a summer vacation in Bible-distribution in Georgia about thirty years ago. He found during that memorable tour Church-members who had Bibles which they never read; Church-members who said they wanted no Bibles; Church-members who could not read, and some who read, and prized the word of God beyond all price. One case made an indelible impression upon his mind.

Toward sunset one afternoon he entered a rough log-house by the road-side, and was received by a tall, grave-looking woman, who asked him to be seated. After accepting a drink of sparkling cold water from a gourd, he made known his business. The grave face brightened with pleasure.

"It's a good work you are doing, sir," she said, warmly.

"Have you a Bible, madam?"

"Yes, but the print is very fine, and gives me trouble. I am learning to read, and I am getting on right well."

"How long have you been learning?"

"It's more than three years since I first begun. The school-children are a great help to me; they come in as they go home, and help me with the hard words. They are mighty kind to me, God bless 'em! By and by I'll be able to read the Bible for myself, and understand it."

A look of grateful satisfaction beamed from the care-worn face as the words were spoken,

and when a New Testament with large, clear print was placed in her hand, the look of joy touched the visitor's heart with a new feeling as he kneeled with her and prayed that the blessing of God might rest upon that lonely woman, and that his word might guide her to glory.

O ye favored ones, children of the Church, blessed with education, leisure, and ample opportunity, beware! Your unread Bibles are a standing indictment against you. They are proofs of positive disrespect to your Heavenly Father, and of a guilty neglect of a means of grace.

A few words are offered concerning the proper use of the Bible as a means of grace.

Do not forget that it is a Divine book. Read it reverently. No truth of God can touch or bless the irreverent soul. We do not here enter into the question of the nature or degree of the inspiration of the Holy Scriptures. A Bible half-inspired, or inspired "in spots," is not under consideration. Such a Bible is not

worth defending against the assaults of enemies, and cannot be the lamp that lights the path to immortality. Our Bible is the book that gives us the thought of God in a form that satisfies his own wisdom and love. In it we hear his voice, and feel the throb of his heart. Read, expecting to find God in his word.

Exercise your common sense in reading the Bible. It is a revelation, and therefore presents what God would have you to know. The mysteries that are in it do not pertain to the things you are to do and to enjoy. There is no mystery in its commands or its promises. The easiest, most natural interpretation is usually the right one. Many of its mysteries are of men's own making. Use any reliable helps that may be within reach; get the right translation of every passage if possible; but use your own common sense, and be only anxious to get the mind of God.

Read the Bible systematically — that is to say, in regular course. A proof of its divin-

ity is found in the continuity of its record and the harmony of its utterances, embracing such vast periods of time and variety of authors as *media* of communication. Read the book in its proper connections, and thus get the unity of its impression, the cumulative force of its historical, prophetic, didactic, and biographical evidence. Read it through, and then begin again. The oftener you do so, the more you will find to repay you for the time spent in every subsequent perusal.

Read your Bible topically. When you are specially interested in any particular doctrine, fact, or phase of religious experience, then is the time to read what the word of God teaches concerning it. The mind, like the body, hungers for particular kinds of food at different times. The appetite indicates the needs of a healthy organism. The body wants acids at one time, alkalies at another. So the soul demands food convenient for it—its portion in due season. Every phase of mental action and spiritual experience is delineated in the

Bible, from the morbid cynicism of the sated voluptuary to the rapturous joy of the consecrated believer under the full afflatus of the Holy Spirit. There is a principle of spiritual selection by which the hungry soul finds in the Bible the aliment it needs. Like God's other book, Nature, it is responsive to all the moods of the mind. You have found this to be so. When your soul was all aglow in its search for some truth of which it had caught a glimpse, or when some precious truth was seen by you in a new light and in wider relations, your Bible seemed almost to be instinct with intelligent sympathy, and to open itself to the very places in which were the precious deposits waiting to be gathered. The hungry soul, like the diviner's rod, is attracted to the veins in which is found the shining treasure. A Bible thus read and penciled becomes an illuminated book, its texts flashing like brilliants in the light of the Lord.

Read your Bible prayerfully. This means that you should pray before reading, while

reading, and after reading. If you proposed to hold converse with a fellow-man of noblest character, high intellectual endowments, and exalted position, you would if possible take a little time to arrange your thoughts and compose your spirit. You approach God in his word. You must concentrate your thought, that you may catch the thought of God as it meets your eye on the printed page. Pray while you read. One of the most devout Christians we have ever known reads all the Bible on his knees once a year. The bodily attitude is not essential, but the prayerful attitude of the soul is indispensable. The true spirit of prayer insures the presence of the Divine Interpreter, and makes the word of the Lord bright with the light and warm with the love of Heaven.



OTHER READING.

"Of making many books there is no end." ECCLES.
xii. 12.

THE Christian growth of many is greatly hindered by what they read. One nail drives another out. The wholesome thought and holy aspiration enkindled by the reading of the word of God is dissipated by the license we allow ourselves in other directions. We must be as particular in the choice of books as in the choice of living companionship. A bad book poisons the soul just as truly as the talk of a bad man. A silly book lowers the mental tone just as truly as does the society of a silly person. The secret of many a crippled Christian life may be found in the library or in the character of the periodical and news-

paper literature that comes to the house. Alongside the Bible is the devil's books of doubt, error, and pollution. On the same shelf with the works of the sages and saints who have interpreted divine truth, and showed us how to live for God, are the specious sophistries of skeptics, the blatant blasphemies, the seductive rhetoric, and insinuated poison of the enemies, open and disguised, of Christianity. But, you say, we must keep up with the times. No, you need not keep up with the times. If you attempt it, you will be led to destruction. You must not give way to a fatal curiosity. Thousands start to hell by that path. Many turn aside from the right way to gratify curiosity. It is good to be simple concerning evil. The very mention of the names of the idol-gods of the heathen was forbidden to the Israelites. It is best not to know many things. A wise self-denial and self-censorship is necessary in this matter of reading. To taste every poison compounded by modern pharmacy, in order to gratify curiosity, or to

judge of its quality, would be less foolish than the indiscriminate reading indulged in by many who have begun the new life. Soul-health is of more importance than that of the body. What you read is of more consequence than what you eat or drink. Better tamper with all the poisons in the *materia medica* than allow your mind to be invaded by the deadly foes to religion that seek entrance in the shape of books, magazines, and newspapers. What rules should be observed in making a discriminating choice of reading-matter?

Have nothing to do with bad books. There are many writers known to be vicious. Their names on the backs of books convey intimations of their character just as unmistakable as those of aconite or prussic acid on the bottles in a drug-store. Touch not, taste not, handle not. Do not buy such books. Do not give them shelter. Do not read them. Let the devil support his own literature. Harbor not nor parley with the avowed enemies of your Saviour.

Beware of books that are partly good and partly bad. Meat a little tainted is not fit to be eaten. So a book a little infected with error is not fit to be read. Throw it aside. To the healthy palate a taste is sufficient to determine the quality of tainted food; so it is not necessary to read a bad book through that you may know its character. The true believer is a discerner of spirits—even the spirit of a book betrays itself quickly to the well-instructed soul. The glitter of the serpent's skin does not conceal its forked tongue and deadly fangs. The virus of one fascinating book in which, mixed with much that is harmless and good, is an infusion of evil suggestion, has shadowed and crippled a whole life. Banish the whole brood of such books. Will some one call this illiberality? Be it so: you are not required to be liberal at the peril of your soul. You are not required to admit into its citadel an enemy that will betray you to death, though he may smile and profess friendship. In the pathway of Christian growth such books

are a fatal obstruction. In the strength of the Lord put away the evil thing. It will require self-denial in some to do this, but it will repay them richly for its exercise. Be self-denying if necessary, and you will reach a point where self-denial will not be needed; for the soul, fortified in wholesome Christian tastes and habits, will turn instinctively and instantly from error and impurity, come in what shape they may.

Do not read at random. This is one of the greatest evils of our times. By this leak many a ship has been sunk. Be on your guard here, or you will be ensnared. The land is flooded with sensational, trashy reading. If you allow it, it will be thrust upon you continually. The devices by which this worthless and worse than worthless literature is foisted upon the public are ingenious and innumerable. It finds its way into Christian families, into railway cars, everywhere, even the bed-chambers of maiden innocence. Meager indeed must be the mental resources of a Christian who

cannot find in his own thoughts better entertainment than is furnished by such reading. The mental dyspepsia that creates an unappeasable morbid appetite for this sort of reading is a stumbling-block to many after they have entered upon the Christian life. Take a stand here, and maintain it. As you would keep your thought pure, and exclude from your heart, which is the temple of the Holy Spirit, all that is inimical to its presence, give no place to this enemy to Christian health and growth. Do not be led into the evil by curiosity. It is not worth while to roll in a mud-hole to see how mud feels. Do not be entrapped by carelessness. The treasure you guard is worth more than whole earthly kingdoms. It is your soul that is in your own keeping under God.

Any reading that lessens your relish for the Bible and for prayer is bad reading for you. Apply this test in all cases.

Conversely, the reading that whets your appetite for the word of God, and disposes you to

prayerfulness, is good reading, and will promote your growth in the Christian life.

Each Christian must determine for himself to what extent he may read for recreation merely and for mental culture. There need be no trouble about this where common sense and a healthy Christian conscience are conjoined. Christian growth must be regarded as the great end of life, and all things should be accepted or rejected, as they help or hinder it.





MEDITATION.

“My meditation of him shall be sweet.” Ps. civ. 34.

MEDITATION is not what many seem to think it is. It is not a vague and dreamy contemplation of religious subjects. It is not dwelling on sacred abstractions, the mind floating at random in the hazy realm of reverie. Divine truth as revealed in the Bible is the proper subject for meditation. After the reading of the word then comes meditation on it. When David said that he meditated in the law of God day and night, he meant that its truths like a golden thread ran through all his thoughts.

Never dismiss a truth from the mind as long as it feeds the soul. It is wonderful how deep a channel the mind will cut when it runs

in one direction for even a single week. A Bible truth thus held in the thought is like a diamond flashing new splendors as the light strikes it at different angles.

Meditation means deep thought, and all deep thought is patient thought. The mind has its own laws, and we must wait upon their action. Thought crystallizes by its own proper law, and the process cannot be hurried. If hurried, it is marred. It were better to read but a single verse of the Bible in a week, and then take another week for meditation upon it, than to read as many do. They crowd the mind with a mass of undigested matter, hurrying from one thing to another without method, coherence, or profit. Truth must be thought over in the mind, digested and assimilated, else it is not in reality ours.

Nothing can properly take the place of your own meditations. The very abundance of reading-matter may become a snare to you. It is one of the evils of cheap printing that with many it lessens the amount of thinking

in proportion as it increases the amount of reading done by them. It was after he had himself meditated on God's word long and patiently that David exclaimed in devout rapture, *O God, thy thoughts are very deep!* He found—as you will find if you meditate thus on passages of the Bible that attract and move you—that they grow on you wonderfully. You will be delighted to find how every truth of God has affinity for every other truth of God. The one text is like a stream that flows on and on, taking in one tributary after another until it becomes a mighty river rolling oceanward.

Preachers who are real students of divine truth are struck with wonder to find how, when God has blessed a text to their own souls, and they have often recurred to it and followed up its suggestions, it has seemed to be inexhaustible, its glorious sweep taking in the whole heaven of revelation. The greatest sermons of the greatest preachers were thus evolved. A text and its exposition will grow for a life-time.

It is not the Christian who has read through the Bible oftenest, but the one who has meditated upon it most deeply, who is richest in the knowledge of heavenly truth. The plain, godly men and women of a former generation, who read little else besides their Bibles, and took time to meditate on what they read, would put many of their more "cultured" and pretentious descendants to shame. They were able and ready to give a reason for the hope that was within them, for they had come into the Christian life by the strait gate, and had thought out for themselves the great truths of the Bible. Their syntax in many cases might be faulty, but their thought was strong and clear. The bread of life, thus digested and assimilated, nourished their souls, and they were mighty in the Scriptures, strong in faith, and rooted and grounded in love.

You say you have no time or opportunity for meditation. Let us consider this a moment. It is not necessary that you should live a secluded life. This is impossible to

many. Their lives are busy ones, and they are forced into contact with the great noisy world in which they live. They are forced to think about business matters, and, to succeed in this age and country, they must be diligent. But this need not preclude meditation on religious truth. *Diligent in business, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord*—this is the apostolic formula for a busy Christian. The fervor and the diligence may go together. But to retain religious fervor amid the hurry of modern business-life, to have meditation upon diviner things run through the clamors of the world like a sweet under-song, requires one thing which many will not give: it requires a resolute and vigorous effort of the will to prevent the thought from wandering at random at detached moments. Idle thoughts, like idle words, are to be avoided. Left to itself, the mind trails like a neglected creeper on the ground; directed by the will, it climbs Godward on the lofty pillars of truth. The lover dwells on the image of his betrothed in the

midst of crowds and when pressed with labors. So the believer, wedded to heavenly truth, carries its image in his heart always, and his thought reverts to it as naturally as the needle turns to the magnet. His life is hid with Christ in God, and that hidden life brings the harmonies of heaven into his soul when the discords of earth are loudest.

But it is well to be alone at times if possible. Nothing in the sufferings of the Apostle Paul has seemed so terrible as the fact that during three long years he was chained night and day to a brutal Roman soldier. There is a pathos in this episode in the apostle's life too deep for words. There are times when you yearn for solitude. You want to recollect yourself, collect your scattered individuality, recover your half-lost identity, separate yourself from the mass, and realize that you are something distinct from the vast whirling universe around you. Obey that healthy instinct. Go out into the country. Climb a hill where you will have the capacious heavens above

you and the freedom and amplitude of Nature all around you, where you hear no voices but Nature's and God's. Plunge deep into the forest, and let your thoughts mingle with the solemn music of the forest-hymn breathed by the winds among the tree-tops. Or, if you can, go and stand on the sea-shore, and look out upon the vast expanse, the emblem of infinity, and meditate on the Infinite God, whose footsteps are on the great waters, and whose paths are in the seas.

The turf shall be my fragrant shrine;
My temple, Lord, that arch of thine;
My censer's breath the mountain airs,
And silent thoughts my only prayers.

My choir shall be the moonlight waves
When murmuring homeward to their caves,
Or when the silence of the sea
E'en more than music speaks of Thee.

God's word and works will speak to the soul at the same time. You will get new revelations of the truth, and the two books—Nature and Revelation—flash new light back and

forth, each upon the other. It is good for man to be alone with God at times under these conditions favorable to the opening of the spiritual ear that has been stunned and dulled by the din of the world.

Meditation is to reading what the harrowing in is to the sowing of the seed. Let your reading be followed by devout meditation.





PRAYER.

"Continue in prayer, and watch in the same."

COLOSSIANS iv. 2.

THE basis of prayer is the promise of God. The philosophy of prayer is another thing. We are not troubled about the philosophy—it is the experience that concerns us now. The philosophy of many things in common life is not understood by multitudes who live in right relation to them, and thus obtain the benefits they are intended to confer. The promise of God is philosophy enough. Ask, and ye shall receive. We ask, and God gives. If we ask any thing according to his will, it shall be done for us. According to his will—that is to say, according to his word. His word tells us in what spirit we must pray, and

what are proper subjects for prayer. The Lord's Prayer is a general model as to the manner. God's glory is to be sought, his will is to be submitted to, his providence is to be recognized, his grace implored, his protection sought. When it is said by the apostle, "*We know not what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered,*" his meaning may be this: That between the things that are explicitly revealed as proper subjects for prayer on the one hand, and the secret things that belong to God on the other, there is a sort of middle ground. Without an explicit warrant to pray, with a direct promise of an answer, there is such a connection between the heart of the suppliant and the subject of his prayers, and the Holy Spirit moves so powerfully upon the praying soul, that it is drawn out with extraordinary earnestness and faith in its approaches to the throne of grace. We have known many devout men and women who have had this experi-

ence in intercessory prayer. They have had a "liberty" at times in praying for others that seemed to be (and who will say it was not?) the special leading of the Holy Spirit. There might be danger here to a person of fanatical tendency. The word is the final arbiter in all such questions. By it try the spirits whether they be of God. Humility is in no danger in this matter. A diseased egotism is usually the cause of fanaticism. The folly of the fanatic is that of the fool who exaggerates his personal importance and relations to sacred things. He claims that he hears voices that tell him strange things. He says the Holy Spirit tells him to do this or that absurd thing—an inordinate vanity, mixed with vague religious sentimentality, taking the place of the humility that listens to the voice of God, and the clear perception of cardinal Christian truths that hold the mind within the limits of what is revealed. There is a blessing here that may be grasped by humility and faith. There is a danger here that may ensnare fanaticism.

The true possessor of the secret of the Lord will walk here with uncovered head and unsandaled feet, for the ground is holy. The fool will rush in where an angel might fear to tread. Lord, teach us how to pray!

Leaving this point with the judicious reader, we proceed to consider other aspects of prayer as a means of promoting growth in the Christian life.

You should have regular habits of prayer. There is more in this matter of habit than many persons think. The law of periodicity pervades the world of mind as well as that of matter. It applies to the religious as well as to the physical sphere; to the activities of the soul as well as the movements of the body. Daniel's habit of praying three times a day had much to do with the maintenance of his faith and hope in the midst of antagonizing and depressing influences. It prevented any backward movement of his soul, keeping him braced up against reactionary tendencies. The habit of doing a thing makes it both easy and

pleasant. A story is told of a State's-prison convict who, being a hard case, was forced to work a tread-mill in order to tame him. At first he was enraged and profane, but at length, from force of habit, he came to like the exercise, and declared if he lived to get out of prison he would have a tread-mill of his own. This is an extreme case, but it illustrates the power of habit. God put this law of habit into our natures that it might bless our lives. The praying habit is the very main-spring of the Christian life. It regulates its whole movement.

Habit means regularity, not hap-hazard. You should have stated times for prayer. Each one must determine for himself how often he ought to pray daily. There is no absolute rule prescribed. To have done this would have been destructive of the freedom and spontaneity of the new life. There is no technical limit to praying or giving in the New Testament. As in the Old Testament one-tenth seems to have been the minimum of

giving for religion, so three times a day seems to be the minimum for praying. When we fall below Old Testament practice in either our gifts or our prayers, we will do well to pause and consider. The holiest and most fruitful Christian lives have been lived by men and women who thus prayed not less than three times a day. The universal adoption of such a habit would fill millions of hearts with new life, and bring a baptism of power upon the Church that would shake the world. The adoption by you of such a habit would lift you at once to a higher plane — endue you with such spiritual power as you never possessed before, and clothe your spirit with the beauty of holiness to a degree beyond your present conception.

You can pray anywhere if you are in the spirit of prayer. You can (blessed truth!) hold audience with God at your own option. The place is not essential to the efficacy of prayer. Yet there is something in the law of association. Daniel knelt daily in the same

chamber consecrated to devotion. There was a help in this. The hallowed associations of that room reacted upon the man of God when he came in from the excitement of the court, shut the door, and, kneeling, prayed to his God. His window opened toward Jerusalem not accidentally, but by special arrangement. As his eye swept over the western hills until vision was lost in the distance, his imagination swept onward until he stood in the courts of the Lord's house on Zion's hill, heard its holy songs, and inhaled the incense that rose from its sacred altars. The law of association is the friend of religion, if we will have it so. The old Bible that we have read and reread in joy and in sorrow—pencil-marked and tear-blotted—somehow speaks to us in a deeper and tenderer tone, for its pages are like a phonograph, holding still the voices of the past. The leaves are turned for us by hands that have struck the harps of God in heaven, and the blessed words have to us special meanings that have been put into them by experiences

that identify themselves in memory with the very form of the pages and the shapes of the letters of the sacred volume. Enter into thy closet—if thou hast one. That is the best place. There you avoid the sights and sounds that divert the thought from sacred things and untune the soul for the touches of the Holy Spirit. God will hear a true prayer anywhere, whether it be from a shipwrecked sailor drifting on a plank in the storm on a midnight sea, or a wanderer dying of thirst on the desert-sands, or a malefactor under the gibbet. But we are not independent of the influence of mental associations. When Jesus said that neither at Mount Gerizim nor at Jerusalem was it necessary to worship God, but that worship must be in spirit and in truth, he did not intend to condemn or discourage the setting apart of particular places for devotion. He was found on the Sabbath in the synagogues, and on the mountain alone at night in solitary prayer. The quiet of the cottage at Bethany was dear to him. Was there a “prophet’s

chamber" in that sweet little home, hallowed by his occupancy, where, out of hearing of the roar of the teeming city, he communed with his Father in prayer? Ten minutes spent alone with God in the middle of the day will sweeten all the intervening hours until the evening prayer is offered, and you lie down and sleep, because it is he that maketh you to dwell in safety. It is good to have not only stated times, but also stated places, for prayer. The instinct of the soul-hungry calls for this, and the difficulties in the way will, in most cases, be surmounted by the ingenuity inspired by strong desire. Whoso has once been hidden in the pavilion of God, and knelt in the awe and ecstasy of prevailing prayer, will remember the spot forever.

You should concentrate in prayer. Do not pray for every thing in general and nothing in particular. There are many things desirable at all times—many things that are proper subjects of petition to the throne of grace; but they are not, therefore, necessarily to be made

a part of every prayer that you offer in public or in private devotion. When a prayer takes in a great number of things, it is often a sign of languid devotion. When there is in reality that deep sense of need which inspires a true prayer, the one thing needed is urged with intense earnestness and directness. A child comes home from school, or from play, and says, "Mother, I am hungry—give me some bread and meat, and some pie, and some pickle, some cake and some preserves, some candy and some nuts, some fruit and some custard." The mother will smile, and say, "Go, my child, and play—you are not hungry." But let the child come into the house with a rapid step, and say, "Mother, I am very hungry indeed—give me some bread and butter, and give it to me right now"—then the mother knows that the child really wants what it asks for, and its prayer is granted.

In the more joyful seasons of the Christian life the prayer of a true believer will at times take the form of thanksgiving. If it be the

genuine expression of a heart overflowing with gratitude to God, the thanksgiving will be rendered not in the vague and general way that obtains when the heart is cold, but it will glow and melt in view of special mercies and direct manifestations of the divine goodness. It was enough for the publican to say, "*God be merciful to me a sinner.*" It was enough for Peter to say, when sinking in the sea, "*Save, Lord, I perish.*" When Paul sought the removal of the thorn in his flesh, he prayed the same prayer thrice, prayed till he got an answer—not the answer he wished, yet a true and gracious answer. This is waiting upon the Lord. This is knocking and still knocking until the door is opened.

The length of a prayer is of no consequence. It is not always the longest prayer that is the most successful. The prayer that prevails is of the right length, whether it be as short as that of the thief on the cross, or as long as that of Jacob at Jabbok.

Do not be greatly distressed if at times, in

spite of all your efforts, there may be dullness and wandering of thought in your prayers. The body clogs the movement of the mind. Not always, but sometimes, it so happens that a state of bodily depression is attended with great spiritual exaltation, as if the frail house of clay could scarcely hold the rejoicing soul. The Apostle Paul gloried in his infirmities, that the power of Christ might rest upon him. The physical feebleness or suffering that you think a chief impediment in your way, may be the very channel through which the Lord pours the richest blessings of his grace into your receptive and obedient heart. But oftener it is found that the intimate sympathy between the soul and body causes the one to react on the other; and this will be so until the redeemed and glorified body shall, after the general resurrection, be reunited to the redeemed and glorified soul, and become its fit vehicle and agent for the higher experiences and sublime achievements that await it in the world of spirits. Earnestness of pur-

pose, and sincerity of motive in approaching God, will do much to make our prayers prevalent even under the most adverse conditions.

But the thought will wander sometimes, and the tendency must be combated. A modest, saintly, and very successful minister of the Tennessee Conference has found great help in preventing wandering thoughts in his private devotions by praying aloud. This is worth considering. There is a law of the mind by which a thought expressed in words becomes more distinctly defined to our consciousness. The momentum of articulated speech, so to speak, gives it a more direct and vigorous movement in a particular channel. God acts with and through the laws which he has put into the human mind, not independently of them or contrary to them. In praying to him, you may most properly use all possible expedients to put your soul into the best attitude toward him, and to order your cause aright. No obstacles can prevent his answering the prayer of faith, but he would have you employ

all available helps to dispose your heart to receive the grace he is always willing to give. There is a wisdom of holy habit that may be cultivated, and which will facilitate the access of the soul to God in prayer. Lord, teach us how to pray!





ASSOCIATIONS.

"We took sweet counsel together." PSALM lv. 14.

THE daily duties and conventionalities of our lives give compulsory direction to much of our association. This cannot be helped, nor should we wish to help it. We must go into the battle of life as we find it, and fight the good fight manfully. The attrition of this worldly contact must not only be met and counteracted, but made to contribute to the development of qualities that round out the character in the elements of strength, self-poise, alertness, and executive energy—all of them qualities of great worth in a world like this. The Heavenly Father will see to it that none of us shall lose any thing by the circumstances surrounding us in the discharge of the

duties that devolve upon us in the relations we hold to society. But there is a large part of our association that is a matter of choice. The choice of a companion for a leisure hour, like the choice of a book, is a sure revealer of moral affinity. Do you prefer the society of the gay and the frivolous to that of the prayerful and the holy? Do you prefer brilliancy with irreligion to the Lord's humble ones whose attraction is the beauty of holiness? Like seeks like. No social tie is so strong as that which binds Christian hearts together as fellow-disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ. Christian friendship is a distinct relation unlike any other. It has in it elements of sacredness, depth, and perpetuity, found nowhere else on earth. This relationship should be asserted at all times in the intercourse of Christians. There are no peculiar pass-words or grips by which they recognize one another, but the love of God that burns in the heart of every true believer is felt by every other believer when brought in contact with it. It overleaps

inequalities in education and fortune, and binds the whole vast body of Christ's followers together as members one of another. "*We know that we have passed from death unto life because we love the brethren.*" How do you stand according to this test? Mind you, the brethren must be loved as brethren. The attraction is the attraction of spirituality, the attraction of Christ's image seen and loved in his disciples. Thus drawn toward one another, they that fear the Lord speak often one to another. Their minds are occupied with the same thoughts, their hearts glow with the same holy affections and hopes. The pressure from without leads them to draw nearer to each other in the sacred fellowship of Christian love. They talk about what is dearest to them of all things. They find a sweet enjoyment that never cloy in the discussion of the exalted truths of religion. They find in these truths ever-new suggestions, and ever-widening sweeps of thought. The subjects of religious thought and converse are as high as heaven, as vast as eternity, as glori-

ous as God. They interlink themselves with every blessed hope and lofty aspiration of the soul. These subjects are inexhaustible, a feast of intellectual and spiritual riches that embraces time and eternity, earth and heaven. The vanities of the world tire at last even the veriest worldlings. But it is the glory of religious truth that it never loses its relish to the renewed soul. It is as fresh as the manna gathered by the hungry Israelites each morning on their march to Canaan. It is new forever. There is no need for a follower of Christ to go on the devil's ground for topics of conversation, nor to eke out weary hours of inanity by joining in the gabbling and giggling that pass for conversation in the gay circles of the world.

It is not enough that we improve such opportunities as may incidentally present themselves to us for religious conversation. We should do as the early Christians did—meet together for that special purpose. There is a charm in a literary club where cultured men and women of

congenial tastes meet to interchange thought and stimulate one another in the pursuit of literature, science, or art. The charm of a religious gathering is as much greater as its topics are higher, and its acquisitions more valuable and enduring. In such a circle of Christian friends the religious experience and culture of each become the property of all. The molding, modifying, enlarging influence of many-sided views of divine truth and methods of expression is potent in smoothing off undue angularity, repressing morbid tendencies of thought and feeling, and preventing narrowness and one-sidedness. The highest type of Christian character to be found in such a circle is that to which all will tend, for there is an upward look and movement in all true souls. There is nothing on this earth more typical of the holy and blessed society of heaven than this. And there is no better preparation than this for the holy companionships and ineffable joys of the city of God. What should be said of the folly of those who find enjoyment only in the inani-

ties of worldlings, and yet are looking to spend eternity with the family of God, where angels veil their faces in the Infinite Presence, and cry, "*Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; heaven and earth are full of his glory*"?

It has already been suggested that thought is clarified by giving it expression in words. The highest, most precious truths of religion formulated in right words are thenceforth seen in a clearer light, held more firmly in the mind, and felt more deeply in the heart. A distinguished lawyer, whose reputation is wider than the State in which he lives, declared that he had learned more theology in its practical bearings from a class-meeting in ten months than he had learned from all other sources in ten years. It was not only what he heard from others, but *what he heard himself say*, that thus enlarged the area and increased the clearness of his religious thought. In making every convert a witness as well as a recipient of grace, our Lord had in view not only the conversion of the unsaved, but also the growth of converts

in grace and knowledge of divine truth. The witnessing Church is the Church that is edified. The witnessing believer is the one who grows. Like a fountain, the mind sends forth a fuller stream when its channel is cleared by the free expression of thought.

Religious conversation is a means of grace of inestimable value subjectively, while it is a fruitful agency in doing good. By it we help to make the heaven we shall enjoy.





TALK.

"If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man." JAMES iii. 2.

THE talk of a life-time is the life itself. Let me know what you say, and I will tell you what you are. Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh. The true character will betray itself in the speech. All the words spoken by you will be a photograph of your moral nature. By your words you shall be judged. It is chiefly by the power of spoken words that it pleases God to save men. The foolishness of preaching is the appointed means. We have the written word. Its leaves are scattered for the healing of the nations. But that is not enough. There is something that cannot be printed on paper.

The living brain, the magnetism of a heart on fire with the love of God, the kindling glance of the eye, the tones of the voice modulated by the varying emotions of the speaker—these cannot be put on paper. The subtle sympathies between soul and soul make the channel for the inflowing grace of God. This gift of speech is that which distinguishes man from the brute creation, and marks the great chasm between the two orders of creatures. It is a high endowment. By it one brain can touch another at will, and the mental and moral riches of one soul become the possession of many. It is a treasure the use of which does not diminish its quantity. You give away a dollar, and it is no longer yours; but give a thought, and it is still yours; yea, it is more yours than before, for a thought is never fully possessed by us until it has been expressed. This is a wonderful fact. You must scatter your thought if you would increase it. The hoarded coin will rust. The water that ceases to flow will become foul. The relation

of Christian experience is a means of conserving our own religious prosperity no less than it is a means of helping others. The reflex influence of our words makes every word a factor in the formation of character. The fruit of our lips is life or death. Like the rudder of a ship, the tongue guides the whole movement of the soul. In a word, make the words of your life right, and the life will be right. The lips must be consecrated. "*If a man offend not in word, that man is perfect.*" That is to say, there is no mode of visible expression of the fidelity, beauty, and power of a true Christian life so conclusive as the right use of this wonderful faculty of speech. Silence is golden only under exceptional conditions when speech is useless. How forcible are right words! They are like apples of gold in pictures of silver.

Remember that you must give account of your words to God—not only for evil words in the positive sense, but for idle words. That is to say, we must not speak carelessly. Our

lips belong to God. They are the exponents of what is in the heart. They are the index to the world of what God can do in the way of filling the soul with holy thought and feeling. Foolish speech caricatures your religion, dishonors your Lord. Evil speech libels Him who can make the words of your mouth and the meditation of your heart acceptable in the sight of God.

Cultivate self-command in this matter. The exercise of the will in repressing hasty or improper speech tends to the suppression of the evil temper itself. Give way to anger, and it increases. Impure thought cuts a still deeper channel in the soul when you give it utterance. So powerful is this law of the mind that it is a well-known fact that the mechanical repetition of the words expressive of any particular emotion will generate responsive emotion in the speaker's own soul. It was said derisively of a certain minister that the reason why he wept when nobody else did while he was preaching, was that "the sound of his own

voice was affecting to him." It is so with all speakers. There is a perfect correspondence between all the faculties of the soul and all the bodily senses. This is an arrangement by which God makes all things tributary to the harmonious development of the moral nature of man. Speech reacts upon the sentiments within as those sentiments react on the speech. This was the thought in the mind of the practical Apostle James when he said, "*If any man offend not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.*" Think of this a little. The self-control that will bridle your tongue will suffice to curb every lust of the whole body. Gain this victory, and you sweep the field in triumph. The devil makes his last rally here. It is a sad fact that there are thousands whose unruly tongues neutralize nearly all their good influence as Christians. They do not lie, nor steal, nor swear; they are not unclean nor covetous; but they have unsanctified lips; they are hasty, imprudent, intemperate in speech. They allow every gust

of passion, every foolish fancy, every peevish temper, to have free course—thus discounting their religious profession in the eyes of all who come in contact with them, dissipating the aroma of a sweet Christian atmosphere, and retarding the growth of the soul in the graces that liken it to Christ, and fit it to be the abode of the Holy Spirit. This is the dark blot upon many a life. Thoughtlessness is often the cause. Imitative of evil example, many adopt wrong habits of speech without thinking, and go on in the bad way without stopping to consider. A Christian cannot afford to be thoughtless and careless about his speech. Malaria is none the less deadly because you inhale it without thought. The whole tone of your life may be lowered by this fault. It is a loose rivet that cripples its whole machinery.

Consecrated lips give you the advantage of an aggressive defense against the irruption of worldliness and frivolity. A positive religious tone in your talk shuts out that of a contrary

character. It is easier to start in the right channel than it is to get into it after you are launched upon the stream of conversation. Once committed even passively to the "foolish talking and jesting," aimless and godless, which is so common, and you are swept on with its tide. If you try to extricate yourself, you find it to be difficult or impossible. Silence is often awkward. Thus you are made a participant, in some measure, in that which is a folly and a sin.

It is not necessary to do the least violence to good taste or good manners in order to make your conversation religious, or at least preserve it from being harmful, in all companies. The conversation of every deeply earnest person is tinged by his prevailing passion, whatever it may be. This is what is meant when we are told to let our conversation be seasoned with the salt of grace. It is not to force handfuls of salt down reluctant throats. Some attempt this, and do harm. They cast pearls before swine, who turn and

rend them. They lack the wisdom that wins souls. When a Christian discards common sense he need not expect the Lord to nullify the effects of the folly that he might avoid. The grace that gives the right feeling will go far to suggest the right thought. The wisdom that cometh from above is given liberally to all who ask with a sincere desire to be guided in the right way. The lips and the lives of all willing souls are directed by the Holy Spirit.

Consecrated lips are the convincing expression of a true Christian faith, the finishing touch in the development of Christian character. We have the authority of God for this. The lips that have been consecrated to the Lord on earth will be ready to join in the new song in heaven. Gracious Lord, hallow our lips by the touch of the live coal from thine altar! Amen.



GIVING.

"God loveth a cheerful giver." 2 CORINTHIANS
ix 7.

IF you do not know that giving is a means of grace, you have a secret yet to learn. If this grace be lacking in you, whatever else may be found in the way of orthodox belief and forms of devotion, you are yet lacking in one element of the Christian life. You cannot live Christ's life without giving. He gave all—he gave himself. The very essence of his religion is a love that stints not in its service or its gifts.

If you are a true believer, you are a worker together with Christ. You think his thoughts, you feel as he feels, you are working for the results that he is working for. The salvation

of souls by the spread of the gospel is dearer to him than any thing else. If you have his spirit, this object is as dear to you as it is to him.

From the first God has trained his people to give. From Abel to Abraham, from Abraham to Paul, and from Paul to this hour, giving has been made a duty and a means of grace to all believers. Strike out of the New Testament what is said about giving, and how much of its tenderness and glow will be lost! Leave out what Jesus said and did to enforce and illustrate giving, and how much of beauty and sweetness are gone from the sacred record! Leave it out of the history of the early Church, and we lose the finest tints of the picture that has ravished the heart of the world. Strip it of the principle and practice of giving, and Christianity, shorn of its divinest function, walks the earth with frozen heart and empty hands. The Church that loses this grace becomes a mere lumber-room for dead dogmas, a mark for the taunts of a humanity that scorns

a faith that professes to be of God, and yet fails in the exercise of the goodness and mercy that are the only credentials that will be recognized by him on earth or in heaven.

Obedience to God and imitation of Christ are the all-sufficient motive and ground of obligation to give.

The measure of giving is not left doubtful. One-tenth was the minimum under the Mosaic institute. You cannot fall below that. You will not wish to do so if you have the spirit of Christ. But love will not be limited by a technical rule. Its only measure is ability and opportunity.

The New Testament rule of giving is given by the Apostle Paul: "*Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store as God hath prospered him.*" This was a specific direction for a particular exigency, but it involves the principles that apply to all giving as a Christian duty and means of grace. We must read a little between the lines. "As God hath prospered him"—it is no straining of the

text to say that this means prosperity of soul as well as of purse. No man will give according to his gains in money unless he has made equal gains in spiritual riches. The liberal heart is oftener wanting than the requisite ability. If there were a greater number of liberal souls, would there not be a larger number of well-filled purses among Christians? The silver, and the gold, and the cattle upon a thousand-hills, are the Lord's. He will turn the wealth of the world into the hands of faithful men and women whenever he can find them in his Church.

God leaves you to assess yourself, because he loveth a cheerful giver. He will not coerce your love, nor limit its expression. Cheerful giving is like his own. He gives freely. His love is a fountain that is full and free, and flows forever. Do you find a real pleasure in giving? That is to say, are you a cheerful giver?

These latter days are made glorious by many examples of Christ-like liberality. The

rich give grandly of their abundance. But the blessedness of giving is not confined to the rich. A dollar is as acceptable to God as a million if it be in the one case as in the other the measure of ability. The widow who cast into the treasury her one mite leads a long procession of elect souls poor in this world's goods, but rich in faith, who have honored their Lord and blessed the ages by doing what they could. No brighter crowns will be worn in heaven than will be given to these little ones who gave not as they wished, but as they were able. The fullest measure of reward for liberality may be realized by every believer who has a willing heart. The whole philosophy of this question is conveyed by the words of Jesus: "*Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward.*" An act insignificant in itself—the giving of a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple—that is, because you love the Lord Jesus Christ and

the cause for which he freely poured out his heart's blood—is invested with its true moral quality by the motive from which it springs. This hallows it in the sight of God, and it becomes a treasure laid up in heaven. All such gifts will enhance the riches of the eternal inheritance of the child of God. If you are wise, you will embrace all opportunities to lay up these treasures.

The method of giving demands a word. There is a best way of doing every good thing. There is a best way of giving as a means of grace. The rule already referred to requires three things that are essential to the best method of giving:

Forethought. Lay by in store for a specific purpose. This provision is a stroke of divine wisdom. The objects for which your gifts are reserved are held in your thoughts, and thus get a stronger hold upon your heart. Every dollar thus accumulated has a sort of separate consecration, and brings a separate blessing. It is a blessed privilege to plan, to labor, to

save for Christ in this way. One of the noblest and largest Christian givers of our time said, in reply to some suggestion as to the direction his future gifts should take, "I have all my plans made, and know where to put every dollar I shall be able to give." As a steward of your Lord's money, you cannot without this forethought bestow your gifts properly. Careless giving results in robbing worthy objects of beneficence of that to which they are entitled. If you give to an impostor, you thereby rob the Lord's poor. Careless giving in many cases is no better than stinginess in its results. Such giving is fruitful of vicious mendicancy, and a damage to every good cause that needs men's money and goodwill. When one of these careless givers finds that he has been deceived into giving to an unworthy object, he is too apt to indemnify himself for his haste and folly by rejecting the claims of the most sacred cause that may next be presented to him. There is too much real suffering, and too many demands for help for

enterprises of undoubted worthiness, for any Christian to be careless in the bestowment of his benefactions. Forethought for a cause awakens love for it, incites to prayer for it, and prevents hasty misapplication of your Lord's bounty.

Regularity. Give regularly, systematically. The law of periodicity is potent in the spiritual as in the natural sphere. The tendency to repeat the same acts and processes at the recurrence of given times is well known to students both of intellectual philosophy and physical law. Compliance with the rule of giving regularly once a week will bring you under the operation of this law of habit. You will find an increasing readiness to give, and increasing delight in giving. Beneficence will be the very law of your life, and you will realize the experience of that beatitude so strange to so many who are called Christians: *It is more blessed to give than to receive.*

Frequency. Once a week is the rule as to frequency in giving. Inspired wisdom is ap-

parent in this requirement. It serves a good purpose by keeping you in remembrance of the claims of the cause of Christ. These claims are too apt to be forgotten amid the hurry and turmoil of the world. If presented and responded to only at long intervals, they will lose their force, and may be crowded out of the mind altogether.

This frequent giving is promotive of a true economy. Many useless expenditures will be prevented when you remember that the claims of the Lord's treasury must be met without delay. Long credits in secular business are productive of extravagance and other evils, and they work similar evils in the religious sphere. Frequent giving keeps the heart alive to the duty and privilege of Christian beneficence. A stream that flows on with a quick and steady motion is wholesomer than a pond that is drained off once a year.

A Fiji Christian at a meeting of his Church offered to pay in advance the whole amount of his weekly contributions for the entire year.

"No," said the pastor, "take it all back except for one month. The hinges of a door will get rusty if you open it only once a year."

You would think it a great loss and hardship if you were allowed to pray or to offer a song of praise to God only once in six months or a year. For precisely the same reasons you should protest against any arrangement that would deprive you of the privilege of frequent giving as a means of grace.

By no act of a Christian life can you express more directly your love to your Lord and to his cause. By no other act can you place your feet more exactly in the foot-prints of Jesus. By no other act do you place your own believing, loving heart closer to his. By no other act can you prove to the world the sincerity and depth of your devotion to him, and your love for the souls he loved and died to save. By no other act can you more surely and effectively promote your growth in grace. The liberal soul shall be made fat.



SORROW.

"I have replenished every sorrowful soul." JEREMIAH xxxi. 25.

AFFLICTION springeth not from the dust. Sorrow enters into God's purpose and plan. If it were not best, it would not be so. The mystery of it we cannot solve. Of its philosophy we get luminous hints in the word of God. To say God might have prevented the existence of all sorrow, is idle talk. It is true that he could have refrained from creating any thing. He could have limited his creation to only inanimate things and brute beasts. But he chose to create rational creatures, and to endow them with freedom. In the exercise of this freedom sin and suffering resulted. By no other means could there have been in

the universe a race of beings capable of virtue and holiness. Be sure that God did the best thing that could be done. This the believing heart can accept on God's testimony. This the believing heart feels to be so, though it may be unable to explain the great truth. It is better to travel the path of sorrow and conflict to eternal life than not to be at all. The promise is given to us that what we know not now we shall know hereafter. We can adopt the logic of faith: as our Father in heaven is true to his promise to comfort and support me under sorrow now, he will not fail to give the fuller light he hath promised hereafter. Faith, already enjoying the earnest of its inheritance, can wait for the full manifestation of the sons of God.

For the fuller life and wider affinities that await the believer in the world to come this sorrow is part of his preparation. The fellowship of the saints in glory will be sweetened for eternity by their common experiences of sorrow and suffering on earth. They have

fought the same battle; they have felt the same agonies; they have clung in the midst of the storm to the same promises, and in the darkness lifted their swimming eyes to the one light that never grows dim; they have met the same last enemy, death; and this identity of experience will enhance the tenderness and sacredness of the bond that binds them for eternity. By dying-beds eyes have met and hands have clasped, and breaking hearts have had new revelations of the everlastingness of holy love and of the meaning of immortality. The husband and wife, whose mingled tears have fallen hot on the face of a dead child, are thenceforth doubly wedded in the bitter sacrament of sorrow. O sorrowing brothers and sisters of earth and time, when you reach heaven it will be found that the sighings and sobbings of this present time will have tuned your spirits for the melodies of the great company of the redeemed that shall be gathered on Mount Zion out of every nation, kindred, tribe, and tongue!

Real sorrow is very bitter. It is your thought, There is no sorrow like my sorrow. That is true. The heart knoweth its own bitterness. Any thing but this—O my God, any thing but this!—you cry in your agony. If my children were religious, I could bear any privation—I could live in a hovel, and live on bread and water. If God would only spare the life of my child, I can bear any thing else that may befall me. I could have borne calamity if I had been spared the shame that results from crime. The blow falls where it hurts most. This is the law of sorrow, and this is the lot of all. The white-robed hosts have gone up through *great* tribulation. If you go up, you must tread that path. The one fact of death alone is enough to make it so. Jesus, with heaving breast and wet eyes at the grave of Lazarus, tells us what death is to love. Real sorrow is the furnace, burning with seven-fold heat, in which the gold is refined and the dross consumed. There is nothing left but to trust in God and lie low at his feet.

A great sorrow is a revealer of unbelief, and gives new power to faith. It never leaves us the same. Not until we reach heaven shall we know how many souls have learned the secret of the Lord in the school of sorrow. The faith that comes out of a great affliction unshaken is stronger forever.

Jesus stands at the head of humanity by virtue of his pre-eminence in suffering no less than by his pre-eminence in goodness. He was the Man of Sorrows. There were elements of bitterness in his grief that none could share, or fully comprehend. He trod the wine-press alone. There was an awful depth in his sorrow that could be fathomed only by the Father to whom in his agony he prayed. Even the holy angels that ministered unto him could not measure the meaning of the mighty grief that drew them wondering from the skies. The sorrowing Christ is the refuge of a sorrowing world. Because he has drunk of our bitter cup he is our merciful high-priest. The Captain of our salvation was perfected

through suffering, and we tread the same path to the perfection of character and destiny that awaits us.

What God permits is best. All things work together for good to them that love him. The heart-felt persuasion of this truth fortifies the soul against all external calamity, and subordinates the sharpest pains and heaviest woes to the development of the character that will be adapted to the pure joys and sublime companionships of heaven.

The shock of a great sorrow may for a time almost paralyze the faith of a true believer, but it will rally sooner or later. After a fire has swept through one of the vast red-wood forests in California, some of the great trees die, while others, though scorched and blackened, are unhurt. Cutting into the trees, it is found that the trees that were killed by the fire were already decayed at the heart. So the fires of affliction do not destroy true faith—they only test and develop its power. Sorrow is the supreme test of faith. The more inex-

plicable the calamity that wrings the heart, the more completely is the soul shut up to absolute trust in God. In this attitude it gets closer to the very heart of the loving Father in heaven, and into more perfect harmony with his righteous will. The soul that has been comforted of God under a heavy sorrow has learned a secret of the Lord that a holy angel might covet to know—the secret whispered to the soul by that blessed Comforter which can alone enter its inner sanctuary. Sorrow has started and helped on the way to glory a great company of souls beloved of God. When a young and ambitious physician, Dr. Abram Penn, of Virginia, on his return from a long journey, found that his fair young bride had died while he was gone. The shock was great, but his life was changed. Kneeling on her grave, he resolved to obey the call of God to preach the gospel, and rose with a new purpose in his smitten heart.

The prolonged sufferings of good men and women present a painful problem to many

minds. Why does not God interfere? He could give them relief by curing their diseases, or by taking them out of the world. But he does neither. They are left to suffer on and on through long years of pain and sorrow. They would welcome death with joy, but it comes not. A venerable Christian man belonging to my pastoral charge at Santa Rosa, California, suffered intensely during the last year of his life. At times his agonies were indescribable. One day he sent for me. After a hurried greeting, he said, with quivering lip:

“The medicine I am taking prolongs my life, which is only prolonging my pain, and keeping me out of my rest in heaven. Would it be wrong for me to stop using the medicine?”

“I think, my dear old friend, that you had better continue to take the medicine. In the providence of God it has been provided for you, and it would be a sort of negative suicide to refuse it.”

The old man burst into tears, while his frame

shook with a great struggle within, as he remarked:

“I will take the medicine, and trust my God.”

We prayed together, and the old sufferer found—not deliverance from his terrible sufferings—but grace to help him in time of need. He, and Paul, and a great company of suffering brothers and sisters, have learned more fully why their thorns in the flesh were not removed in answer to the prayers wrung from them in their agonies. Yes, it is a great multitude that have gone up through these great tribulations. You should not murmur should you be called to walk in the way they have trod.





THE GOAL.

"Go on unto perfection." HEBREWS VI. 1.

WE come now, at the end of these chapters, to a question of the deepest interest to all:

Is there any experience in a renewed soul that cannot be described by the word GROWTH?

The answer is, No. The same thing has been called by different names. Christian men and women have agreed in their lives, but not in their terminology. At times the disputants have lost more in temper than they have gained in knowledge of the truth. Certain propositions have been affirmed and denied with equal emphasis by a great company of believers whose beautiful lives have equally proved the genuineness of their faith and the

transforming power of the grace of God. All who have been truly born into the new life, and are following Christ, are substantially agreed in their Christian experience. They find growth in grace to be a fact; they find sanctification to be a fact. Both are promised, and both are given, to all who follow on to know the Lord.

When growth in grace begins, sanctification begins. Every accepted believer is initially a sanctified believer. The love of God is not shed abroad in an unsanctified heart. The joy of the Holy Ghost is not given to an unsanctified soul.

But what shall be said of the experiences of the great company of excellent men and women who tell us they have been sanctified wholly by a process as distinct as that of justification or regeneration in their souls, and date a new and higher life therefrom? Of their good sense and sincerity there can be no doubt. That they have lived lives of singular spirituality and fruitfulness no one will deny. They

are not fanatics or impostors. What then? There is a reality of some sort in their experiences. We have known many whose after-lives exhibited a sweetness and joyfulness justifying the claim that a mighty impulse had somehow been given to their movement heavenward. What was the gracious secret? Just what God whispers to every soul that claims the fulfillment of the promise that they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, and mount up on wings as eagles. In some cases after spiritual declension there has been a return unto the Lord, and the restoration to the penitent and believing soul of the joys of his salvation. In other cases, while there was no abatement in the use of the forms of religion, its power was lost. Quickened by the Holy Spirit, the soul was led to seek the power as well as the form of godliness, and, sprinkled with atoning blood through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, it has received the full baptism of the Holy Spirit. Was this sanctification? Yes. Was it growth? Yes. Some called it

by the one name, some by the other. It was the setting apart of the soul anew and without reserve to the Christian life—and that was sanctification in the true sense of the word. Growth is a process of which sanctification is the result, and all growth is an increase of sanctification. It was an increase of spiritual light and power—and that was growth. There are Christians who look back to one such experience, and regard it as epochal in their lives. There are others who again and again receive these special baptisms without conscious reactions. Their growth in grace is wonderfully accelerated in such seasons; and it does not cease, for our gracious Lord gives grace for grace. In climbing a peak of the Sierra Nevadas, after much toil you reach a shelf, or table, that serves as a resting-place, and from which you have an enchanting view of the smiling valley below. Inspired and refreshed, you resume the ascent, and after further toil you reach another stopping-place, where you again rest and gaze with delight

upon the broader landscape that stretches away beneath your feet. And so on and up you go until at last you stand on the summit, and shout for joy as the whole sweep of the glorious view bursts upon your ravished vision. So it is in the Christian life. There are goals, but no stopping-place. It must go ever onward and upward. But do we not reach the summit at last? There is no summit to the hills of God—or rather they are all summits, rising higher and higher, and giving the redeemed soul wider horizons and brighter light as he goes on in his eternal upward movement. These hills of God stretch away through eternity. Many elect souls have for many blessed years gone on from grace to grace in this upward way; while others, dying young, have been caught up to God while the dew of their first heavenly baptism was fresh upon them. God, who guides the trusting soul that lives on in the path of duty, is not less gracious to the trusting soul called early from the conflict.

In the beginning of the Christian life there

are usually reactions, partial lapses, stumblings, haltings. Usually, we say, these may be expected. Children, in learning to walk, have falls at first, and make missteps. The young Christian is but a babe in Christ, and cannot be expected to possess the knowledge, stability, and strength, of maturity. He grows in all these elements of the Christian life. Weakness is not disease ; feebleness is not sin. His knowledge enlarges, he is more and more established, and becomes stronger in the strength of God. The child becomes a man. The novice becomes well instructed in the things of God. He goes on to perfection.

What is this perfection? The perfection not of the glorified in heaven, but of the sanctified on earth; the perfection of a faith that does not waver, the perfection of a consecration that keeps nothing back, the perfection of a love that never grows cold, the perfection of a hope that is full of glory. It is the perfection of a soul that receives now all that God proposes to bestow now.

This perfection does not stop growth in grace; it removes the hinderances, and makes that growth more rapid. It does not place its possessor beyond the reach of temptation, but it does enable him to resist successfully, his faith quenching all the fiery darts of the wicked. It does not place him above the reach of care and sorrow, but enables him to run with patience the race set before him. It does not relieve him from liability to errors in judgment, but it does save him from willful departures from the right way. It does not save him from the necessity to watch and pray, but it does arm him against all the wiles of Satan. It does not protect him from the assaults of the dark trinity of evil—the world, the flesh, and the devil—but it does give him the victory of faith. In a word, he is not saved from the possibility of reaction, but from the necessity for it. The witnessing Spirit that fills his soul with the sense of sonship with God need never depart. The flame of love that burns in his heart need never be quenched. The hope that gives him

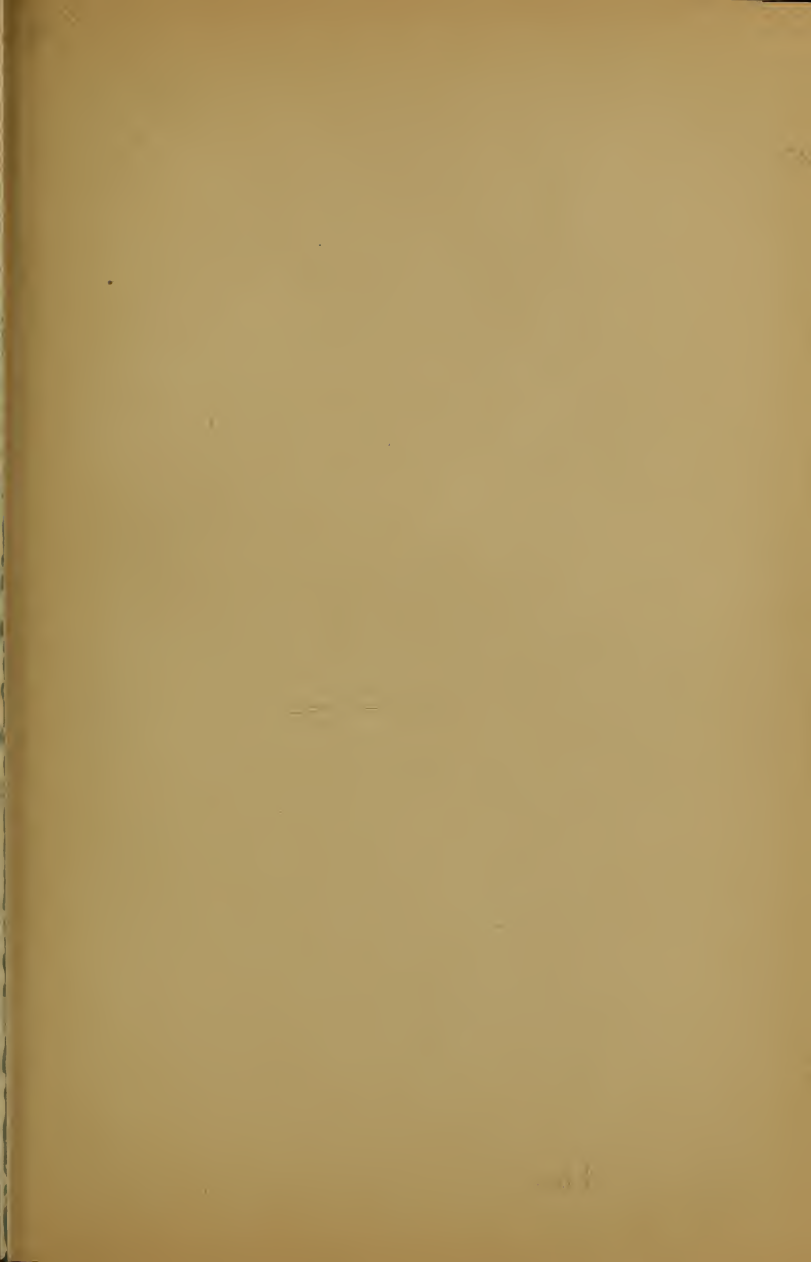
blessed anticipations of the glory of God in its full manifestation in the life to come need never grow dim. There is no backward movement, and there is no stopping-place.

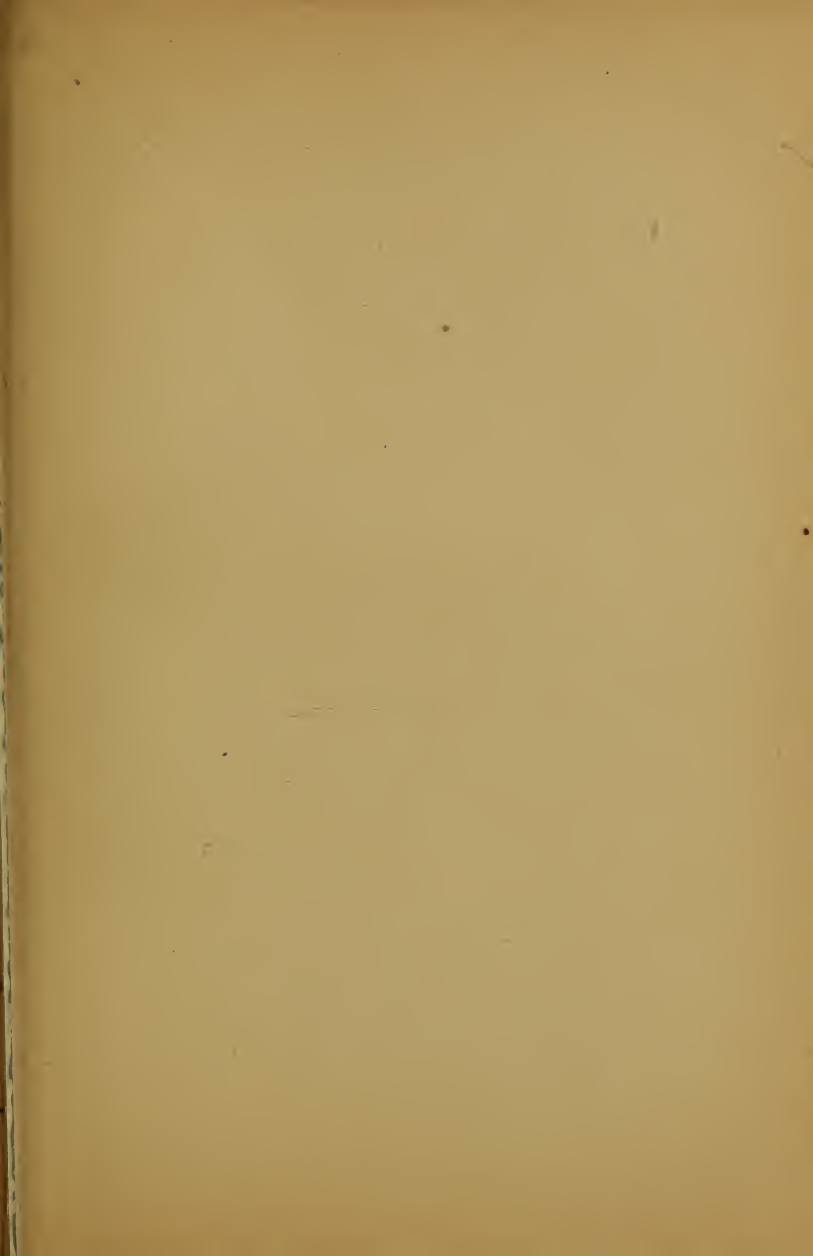
Thus understood, entire sanctification is a blessed, glorious reality. The good pleasure of God's goodness will not stop short of this in a willing soul. It is purity, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost; not as an occasional flash of blessedness, but as the normal, abiding experience of all in whom the will of God is fully wrought.

I was profoundly interested in this question about twenty-five years ago. I was at the time pastor of the Church at San Jose, California. One bright morning I was going through the fields on my way to see a young Presbyterian friend who lay dying of consumption out in "The Willows," about two miles from the city. The air was balmy and the sky cloudless; the birds were singing in the sycamores overhead, and the sunshine lay bright and warm upon the beautiful valley. As I walked slowly on, my soul was attuned to the calm, the harmony,

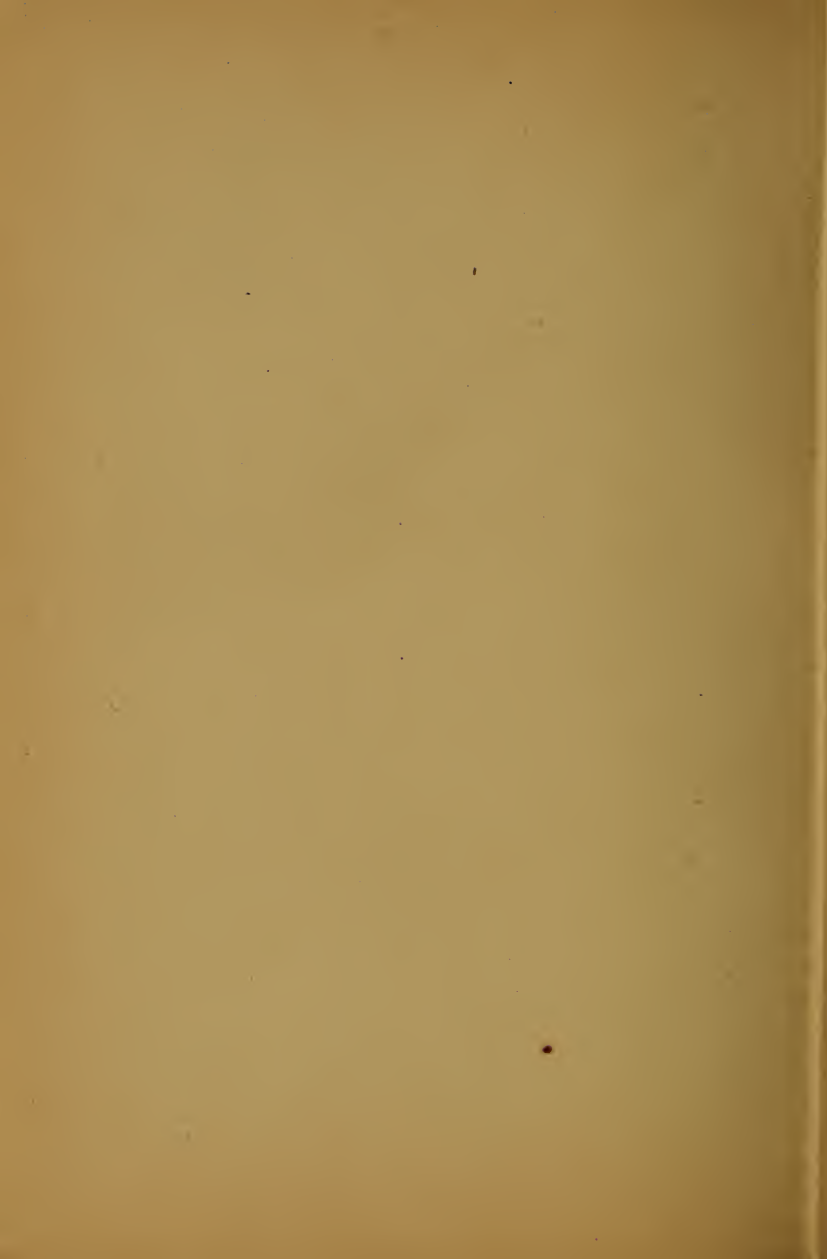
and sweetness of Nature, and I felt a mighty longing for that perfect peace of God, that rest of faith, which had so long engaged my thought and prayer. Lifting my eyes, I beheld the sun in the heavens shining with unclouded splendor. Instantly the mighty truth flashed upon me: *The Sun of righteousness always shines, and upon the soul turned toward it in humble, trusting obedience, it will shine forever!* My spirit was instantly flooded with a great joy, and I said, "This is what I have sought—the Sun of righteousness shines forever!" Long, long years of toil and trial, of pain and sorrow, have passed since that hour, and the same light illumines the page as I write these last lines with a glowing heart.

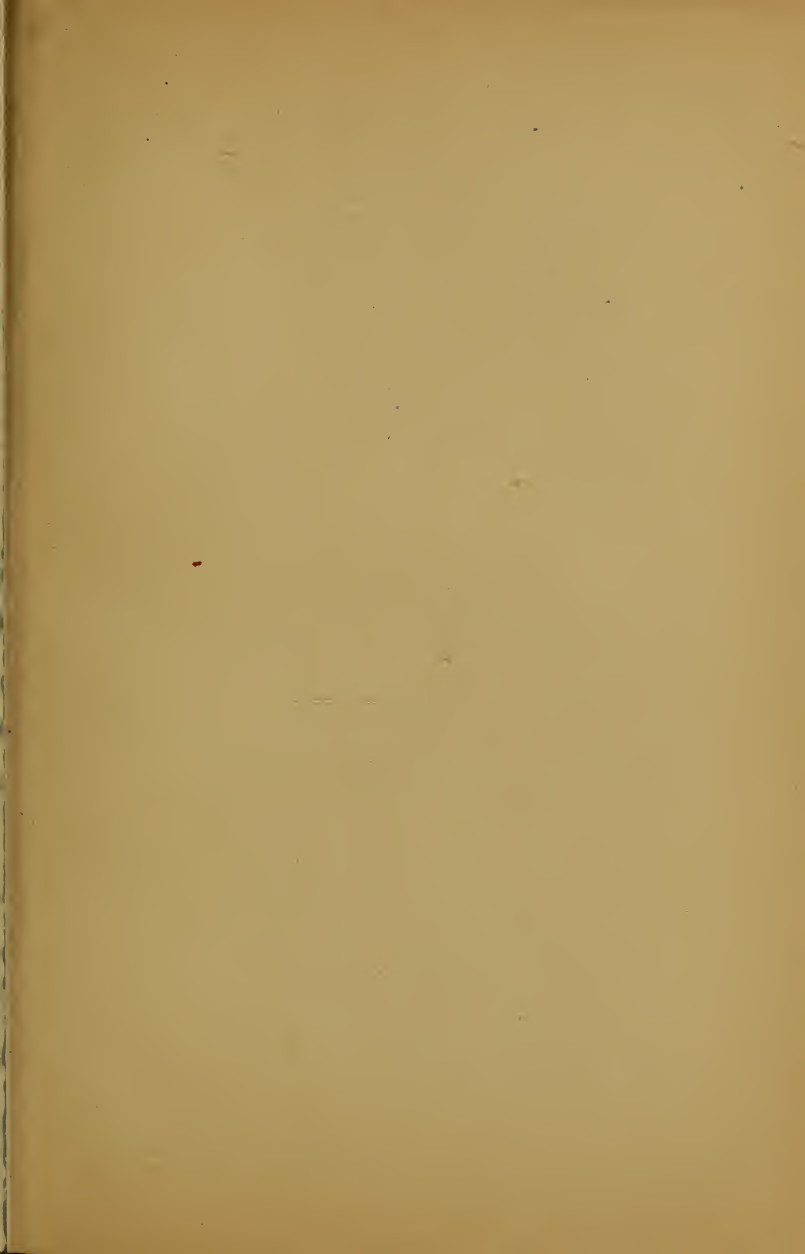
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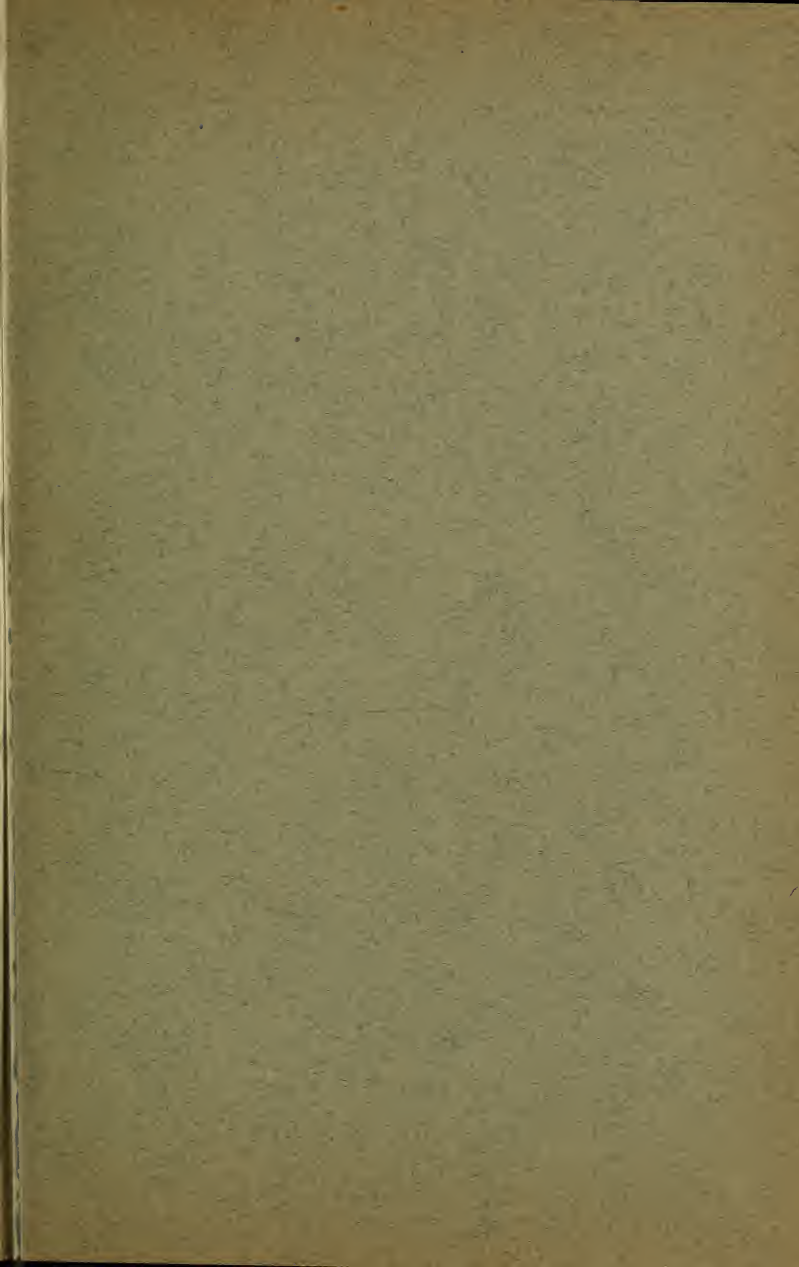












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